



British Columbia Drug and Poison Information Centre (BC DPIC)

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Pepper Spray and Chili Peppers

What is it:

Pepper spray is used in bear and dog repellents, personal defense sprays and in crowd control sprays (by law enforcement). Contains the oily resin from chili peppers (oleoresin capiscum) and a carrier solvent such as rubbing alcohol or a hydrocarbon.

Chili pepper is the common name for the fruit of the genus *Capsicum*. There are many peppers in this genus including jalapeno and cayenne. Used as a spice.

Is it toxic? Contact with the skin or eyes results in an intense burning sensation and possible redness. **Inhalation of pepper spray** results in irritation to the respiratory tract. Severity of symptoms depend on concentration, duration of exposure, and proximity to discharge.

Health Effects:

Eyes: Immediate stinging, burning sensation, tearing and redness. Symptoms usually subside once the eyes are rinsed.

Skin: Possible irritation, redness and a burning sensation.

Inhalation - Pepper spray: Burning sensation in the nose and throat, coughing, sneezing and a feeling that you can't catch your breath. Symptoms may be worse if exposure occurred in a confined space such as a small room or basement. People with asthma may have worsening of symptoms such as wheezing and shortness of breath.

Ingestion: Possible burning or stinging sensation in mouth, nausea and vomiting.

What to do:

Eyes: Rinse eyes with a gentle stream of lukewarm water for 5 minutes by any of the following methods:

Pour a gentle stream of water from a jug or clean teapot over the eye from the inside corner by the nose, across the eye, flowing out towards the ear.

Submerge eye in a container (bowl, sink) of lukewarm water. Have patient open and close eye.

Eye may be irrigated in the shower, if this can be accomplished without delay.

Young children may be wrapped like a mummy in a towel with arms at side and held over the sink or tub or laid on counter during flushing.

Skin: Pepper spray - Remove clothing and place in a plastic bag. Apply vegetable or cooking oil to the skin. Leave it on area for 5 or 10 minutes then wash off with soap and water. Can repeat this several times if needed. If only **on hands from chopping peppers**, fingers may be soaked in oil.

Inhalation: Get away from area where pepper spray was released. If exposure occurred indoors go outside and breathe fresh air. Open windows and doors to ventilate room. Inhalation of steam in a warm shower also provides relief of symptoms.

Ingestion: Rinse out mouth and drink a glass of water or milk. Sucking on ice chips may provide relief.

If symptoms persist after the above first aid measures contact the Poison Control Centre.

Clean up instructions: Wear gloves when cleaning contaminated surfaces and use a mild detergent such as dish soap. Launder contaminated clothes.

How can I prevent exposure? Keep out of reach of children and pets.

Wear gloves when chopping chili peppers.

Need more information: Call the Poison Control Centre.

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