



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Ricin

What is ricin?

Ricin is a natural toxin (poison) that is found in the bean of the castor oil plant. If the castor bean is chewed and swallowed, the poison can make a person sick. The poison can also be found in the waste product left over from making castor oil out of the beans. Ricin can be made into a powder, mist or pellet which can be dissolved in water or acid.

The castor oil plant is found in many parts of the world including most states in the United States. The plant is grown for the purpose of making castor oil or as an ornamental in gardens because of its striking appearance.

How does a person get exposed to ricin?

There are three ways humans can get poisoned by ricin:

- Skin: People are unlikely to get ricin through unbroken skin, but it can be injected under the skin with a needle or other object.
- Lungs: People could breathe in ricin if it is made into a mist or powder and intentionally released.
- Stomach: People most often get exposed to ricin by swallowing chewed castor beans or the mash that is produced after making castor oil.

Who is at risk for ricin poisoning?

- Anyone who chews and swallows a castor bean could be poisoned
- Someone who is poisoned by another person on purpose

How do I know if I have been poisoned by ricin?

Symptoms depend on how a person was exposed to ricin:

- Skin: it is not likely that a person would get ricin through unbroken skin. Contact with ricin may cause redness or pain in the area of exposure.

- Lungs: within the first day you would find it hard to breathe and have a fever, cough, nausea, and tightness in the chest. The skin may turn blue and your blood pressure may drop. This form can be deadly.
- Stomach: if you swallow a large amount of ricin you will vomit and have diarrhea that may be bloody. You could also have low blood pressure, seizures, and blood in the urine. This form can also be deadly.

How is ricin poisoning treated?

There is no antidote for ricin. Persons who have been poisoned by ricin need to see a doctor immediately for medical care.

Can I get ricin poisoning from another person who has it?

No, it cannot be spread from one person to another.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://emergency.cdc.gov/agent/ricin/>

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