



## MACOMB COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

# RICIN

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

### What is ricin?

- Ricin is a poison found naturally in castor beans.
- If castor beans are chewed or swallowed, the released ricin can cause injury.
- Ricin can be made from the waste material left over from processing castor beans. It can be made into a powder, mist or pellet or dissolved in water or weak acid.

### How toxic is ricin?

- Ricin is very toxic. It prevents the body from making proteins causing cells to die, organs to stop working or even death.
- Death from ricin poisoning can take place within 36 to 72 hours of exposure, depending on the route of exposure (breathed, swallowed, injected) and the dose received. If death has not occurred in 3 to 5 days, the victim usually recovers.

### Can ricin spread from person to person?

Ricin poisoning is not contagious. However, contaminated clothing could potentially expose people in enclosed spaces.

### Is there a vaccine for ricin?

No commercially available vaccine exists for ricin.

### What are the signs and symptoms of ricin poisoning?

#### General signs and symptoms

- Weakness
- Dehydration
- Fatigue
- Fever
- Muscle pain



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## How is the infection treated?

### Gastrointestinal signs and symptoms

If swallowed, initial symptoms occur in 6-12 hours and then rapidly progress over 12-24 hours.

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Diarrhea
- Severe dehydration
- Kidney and liver problems

### Respiratory signs and symptoms

If inhaled, initial symptoms occur in 4-6 hours and then rapidly progress over 12-24 hours.

- Difficulty breathing
- Shortness of breath
- Tightness of the chest
- Cough
- Fluid in the lungs
- Respiratory failure

## What should I do if I think I have symptoms of ricin poisoning?

Seek medical attention immediately.

## How is ricin poisoning treated?

- No commercially available antidote exists to stop the effects of ricin.
- Supportive care is provided to minimize the effects of the poisoning. The type of care depends on how the victim was poisoned. Care could include help with breathing, intravenous fluids, medications to treat seizures or low blood pressure, flushing stomach contents or eye irrigation.

## What should I do if I am in an area where ricin was released?

- Get to fresh air stay where the air is fresh
- Remove your clothing
- Wash all over with soap and water
- Follow instructions from health officials

## How can I get health advisories or alerts?

- In the event of a public health threat or emergency, the Macomb County Health Department will make frequent public announcements.
- Listen to local radio and TV for more information. You may also visit <http://macombcountymi.gov/publichealth> or call 586-466-7923 for instructions.

### **MORE RICIN INFORMATION**

Ricin: Michigan Prepares (MDCH/OPHP)  
[http://michigan.gov/michiganprepares/0,1607,7-232-42878\\_42886\\_43063-148395--,00.html](http://michigan.gov/michiganprepares/0,1607,7-232-42878_42886_43063-148395--,00.html)

Ricin (CDC)  
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/ricin/>

Call the CDC at **1-800-CDC-INFO** or **1-888-232-6348** (TTY).

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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<http://macombcountymi.gov/publichealth>