



# SULFUR MUSTARD: KEY FACTS

Not naturally found in the environment, sulfur mustard or mustard gas, is a type of chemical warfare agent. Also called H, HD, or HT, sulfur mustard is a vesicant or blistering agent that can cause blistering of skin and mucous membranes upon contact. Although it is generally not fatal and even has some medical causes (such as the treatment of psoriasis) it can be dangerous in high doses and can still cause a number of symptoms including burns, irritation, blindness and vomiting. Sulfur mustard can be in a liquid, vapor, or solid, can smell like garlic onions or mustard and can be yellow to brown. It however can also be colorless and odorless.

The following fact sheet was developed with information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Emergency Preparedness and Response (<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/sulfur/mustard/index.asp>) and it highlights key information about this agent.

## Is Sulfur Mustard a Serious Threat?

- Sulfur mustard traditionally has been used as a chemical warfare agent.
- It can last in the environment for 1-2 days during average weather conditions and longer during cold weather
- Sulfur mustard takes a long time to break down in the body and can build up from repeated exposures

## How Sulfur Mustard is Spread

- Following the release of sulfur mustard into the air, people can breathe in the vapor.
- Sulfur mustard can be released into the water supply affecting people through exposure and drinking

## Symptoms

- Skin contact:
  - Within 2 to 48 hours – redness, itching, eventual yellow blistering
- Eyes:
  - Within 3 to 12 hours – irritation, pain, swelling, tearing, and light sensitivity
- Inhalation:
  - Within 2 to 4 hours and 12 to 24 hours depending on the severity of exposure – runny or bloody nose, sneezing, hoarseness, sinus pain, shortness of breath and cough
- Ingestion:
  - Vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and fever
- Usually symptoms are delayed from 2 to 48 hours depending the severity and mode of exposure.
- Long-term exposure symptoms may include – second- and third-degree burns, scarring, respiratory infections, blindness, development of cancer and death.

## Treatment for Sulfur Mustard

- No antidote for sulfur mustard exists but sulfur mustard is not usually lethal.
- The most important thing is to get the sulfur mustard off or out of the body as soon as possible.
- Seek medical attention immediately.

## CDC GUIDELINES AND RESOURCES

---

CDC sulfur mustard Home Page ([http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/sulfur\\_mustard/index.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/sulfur_mustard/index.asp))  
General and technical information on the subject

Facts about sulfur mustard ([http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/sulfur\\_mustard/facts.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/sulfur_mustard/facts.asp))  
Answers to the most common questions

CDC public inquiry hotline (English: 1-888-246-2675, Spanish: 1-888-246-2857, and hearing-impaired: 1-866-874-2646)

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (1-888-422-8737)

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

---

Checking with the CDC web site provides perhaps the best way to stay informed. The CDC updates guidelines and all web resources to reflect current information. In addition, information about sulfur mustard will be added to the Washington Business Group on Health's web site as it become available. Check [Employer Resources for Terrorism and Public Health Emergency Preparedness](#) periodically for updates.

Contact: Ian Dixon ([dixon@businessgrouphealth.org](mailto:dixon@businessgrouphealth.org))