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| Commercial pesticides -  Safety in the home |
| Community factsheet  Updated December 2024 |

Sometimes you might have pest problems that will be too difficult for your to manage yourself. For these jobs, you should hire a licensed pest control operator who may suggest the use of a pesticide.

## What are pesticides?

Pesticides are substances used to manage pests and

include insecticides used for insect control, herbicides

used for weed control, and rodenticides used for

rodent control.

Pesticides are toxic and if used carelessly they may

damage the health of the person

applying the pesticide, the health of

other people in the community



and the environment. For

this reason there is

legislation governing the

use of pesticides, and

precautions that should be

taken in order to minimise

exposure to these substances.

## How can pesticides affect my health?

Pesticides can take the form of a solid, liquid, gas or powder.

The form will influence the way in which the pesticide

can enter your body and potentially affect your health.

There are four ways in which pesticides can enter

the body:

* by swallowing pesticide, eating, drinking or smoking after handling pesticide, or consuming food or drink exposed to pesticide
* by skin coming into contact with pesticide –– directly, through pesticide soaked clothing or pesticide treated surfaces
* by inhaling pesticide vapours, sprays or dusts
* by rubbing eyes after handling pesticide, or pesticide coming into direct contact with eyes.

Minimising your exposure and taking care when

coming into contact with pesticides will reduce the

chance of experiencing adverse health effects.

## Poisoning and first aid

Poisoning, as a result of exposure to pesticides, may occur shortly after a single exposure (acute poisoning) or gradually after repeated exposures over a period of time (chronic poisoning). The type, duration and severity of symptoms may vary depending on factors such as the type and concentration of the pesticide, the degree of exposure, and the health and age of the person exposed. Many of the potential symptoms are not specific to pesticide poisoning––they may be due to other conditions, such as illness or allergy.

Although anyone may be affected by exposure to



pesticides, certain groups are particularly susceptible

including:

* unborn babies and young children
* pregnant and nursing women
* elderly people.

If you or your family develop symptoms soon after

exposure to pesticides, contact a doctor

immediately or call the Poisons Information Centre

on 13 11 26. Remember to provide details of the

exposure including the product name if possible.

For further information regarding some of the potential

symptoms of pesticide poisoning see below.

## Acute poisoning

Symptoms may begin shortly after exposure and

may include headache, dizziness, nausea,

vomiting, stomach cramps, diarrhoea, blurred

vision, excessive eye watering, sweating and

salivation.

More severe poisoning may also lead to changes

in heart rate, chest tightness, muscle weakness

and twitching, difficulty breathing and walking,

constricted pupils and incontinence.

In very severe cases of poisoning, seizures and

unconsciousness may occur.

## Chronic poisoning

Symptoms may occur gradually after repeated

exposures over a period of time and may include

muscle weakness and fatigue, difficulty

concentrating and remembering things and

generally feeling unwell.

Pest control operators take extra precautions, such as wearing protective clothing, because they are around pesticides all the time and are at a greater risk of exposure.

## Safety precautions

• use only a licensed pest control operator

• obtain the full chemical name of the pesticide to be

used - in the event of an emergency this will assist

with first aid

• ensure food, clothes, toys, toothbrushes, bedding,

towels, vegetable gardens, barbeques, pet bowls,

fish ponds, clotheslines and cooking utensils are

covered or removed from the area to be treated

• relocate pets during treatment and until the

pesticide is dry

• if the pesticide is to be applied outdoors, ensure

that all doors and windows are closed

• vacate the premises while the pesticide is mixed

and applied, and until the pesticide is dry. Four to

six hours is generally recommended but your pest

control operator will recommend the appropriate

time based on the specific treatment option used.

• if the pesticide has been applied indoors, ensure

that benchtops and kitchen utensils are thoroughly

cleaned prior to food preparation and ventilate the

house, by opening all doors and windows, for a few

hours upon return

• it is recommended that you advise your neighbours

in advance of any external pesticide treatments.

Raise any concerns such as how the pesticide

could affect pregnancy, young children or allergies

with your pest control operator before they start

work so that they can discuss treatment options

with you. A good pest control operator will listen to

your concerns and address them by using the

most appropriate pest control method.

Although pesticides are toxic and there are risks

associated with pesticide use, licensed pest control

operators are trained in the safe handling, storage

and application of these substances.

If the appropriate precautions are taken to minimise

exposure to pesticides, the risk to health is greatly

reduced.

## Pest control licensing

Due to the potential risks involved in handling

pesticides, anyone who uses pesticides in the course



of a pest control business in

Victoria is required to hold a

**pest control licence** issued

by the Department of Health.  
For more information about pest control licensing contact the Department of Health via email – pesticidesafety@health.vic.gov.au  
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