

# Mustard Gas

**Sulfur mustard, or mustard gas, is a chemical agent used in warfare. It is known as a blistering agent because it can cause blistering of the skin and mucous membranes upon contact.**

**It can also cause severe tissue damage to the eyes, respiratory system, and internal organs. Sulfur mustard is not naturally found in the environment.**

## **Why should I be concerned about mustard gas?**

Mustard agents have traditionally been used in chemical warfare. Unlike the symptoms of exposure to other chemical agents which usually appear immediately, the symptoms to exposure to mustard gas appear one to six hours or more later. Mustard gas also attacks a cell's DNA, so it can cause cancer and birth defects.

## **Does mustard gas have anything to do with mustard?**

No. In some forms it is yellowish and reputedly smells like mustard, but its aroma has also been likened to the smell of horseradish, garlic, and apples. At room temperature, it's actually a liquid rather than a gas, but the name "mustard gas" has stuck since it was used in notorious gas attacks during World War I. Until recently it was available for use in the treatment of a skin condition called psoriasis. Currently, it has no medical use.

## **What are the symptoms?**

Sulfur mustard can have the following effects on certain parts of the body:

- ◆ Skin: Within two-48 hours, redness, itching, eventual yellow blistering
- ◆ Eyes: Within three to 12 hours, irritation, pain, swelling, tearing, and light sensitivity
- ◆ Inhalation: Within two to four 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 two to 48 hours depending on the severity and mode of exposure. Long-term exposure symptoms may include — second third degree burns, scarring, respiratory infections, blindness, development of cancer, and death.

## **How does mustard gas compare with other deadly chemicals such as sarin and VX?**

Mustard gas is less likely to kill large numbers of people than nerve agents such as sarin and VX. It would take vastly more mustard gas than nerve gas to kill the same number of people, limiting mustard gas' appeal to terrorists. But depending on the level of exposure, mustard gas could leave victims with more lasting injuries than nerve gases.

## **What is the treatment?**

There is no antidote for sulfur mustard, but it is usually not lethal. The most important thing to do is to get the sulfur mustard off or out of the body as soon as possible and seek medical attention immediately.

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