



Trichloroethylene (TCE)

and your health

What is Trichloroethylene (TCE)?

Trichloroethylene, or TCE, is a volatile colorless solvent with a sweet odor. It is mostly used in industrial processes to remove grease from metal parts. Some household products, like paint removers, adhesives, and spot removers, also contain TCE. Because it is widely used, TCE is one of the more common man-made compounds found in the environment.

What happens to TCE in the environment?

TCE may enter the air, water, and soil at places where it is used. It evaporates quickly in outdoor air, and is not usually present in surface soils or in open water. TCE can move down through the soil into groundwater, which people may use as a drinking water source. TCE can remain in soil and groundwater for a long time. It can also get into indoor air through vapor intrusion or evaporation from tap water.

How can TCE affect my health?

Whether TCE exposure will affect your health depends on many factors, including how much TCE you are exposed to, how long you are exposed, and how often you are exposed. If you have concerns about your health, speak to your health care provider.

People exposed to TCE may have eye, nose, and skin irritation, headache, and drowsiness.

People exposed to very high levels may lose consciousness. Long-term exposure to high levels can damage the liver, kidneys, and the immune and nervous systems.

Unborn babies exposed to TCE may develop heart defects.

People exposed to TCE for a long time may develop cancer. There is evidence that TCE can cause kidney and liver cancer and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.



How are people exposed to TCE?

People most commonly get exposed to TCE by:

- Breathing air contaminated with TCE
- Drinking water contaminated with TCE
- Breathing or touching TCE while using it at work

Is there a medical test to show if someone has been exposed to TCE?

Blood and urine tests can detect recent exposure to large amounts of TCE. But these tests do not help doctors determine what health effects might result from the exposure. Most doctors' offices do not perform these tests.

How can I reduce my exposure to TCE?

- Keep crawlspace vents open and not blocked
- Make sure your house is well ventilated
- If you have concerns about TCE in your tap water, contact your local drinking water authorities and follow their advice.
- Do not allow children to play in dirt near a TCE-contaminated site
- Always follow the directions on household product labels

For more Information:

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