



# Solvent Safety

Solvents are chemicals that dissolve other substances. They easily evaporate into the air and are a source of indoor and outdoor air pollution. You can be exposed to solvents by breathing them, absorbing them through your skin, or swallowing them. Exposure can cause various health effects in humans. The developing fetus, infants, and children may be especially vulnerable.

## Solvents are found in many common household products:

- paint, paint thinner, varnish and strippers
- many store bought household cleaners
- adhesives and glue
- permanent markers
- personal care products such as hair spray, gel, perfume, deodorant sprays, and after shave

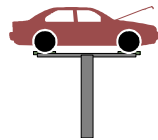


- nail polish and nail polish remover
- aerosol sprays
- air fresheners, including plug-ins
- automotive products such as degreasers, anti-freeze, and fuels
- some pesticides



## Occupations at “high risk” for exposure to solvents include:

- janitorial work
- household cleaning
- dry cleaning
- auto repair and mechanics
- manufacturing: electronics, semi-conductors, circuit boards



- plastics
- printing
- painting
- furniture refinishing
- carpet installation
- cosmetology (especially nail salons)

## Immediate Symptoms include:

- ear, nose and throat irritation
- respiratory tract irritation (hoarseness, coughing, shortness of breath)
- worsening of asthma symptoms
- headache
- nausea
- skin rashes
- confusion
- dizziness

## Symptoms, cont...

- Prolonged exposure can lead to irregular heartbeat, birth defects, and damage to the kidneys, liver, lungs, and the central nervous system.
- Regular contact can also cause memory and hearing loss, depression, fatigue, and lack of coordination.

*Some solvents such as benzene in gasoline are known to cause cancer.*

## **The extent and nature of the health effect will depend on the level of exposure and length of time exposed. To reduce exposure:**

- Increase ventilation when using products that contain solvents – go outside or provide plenty of fresh air by opening windows or turning on a fan.
- Read the product labels and follow directions very carefully.



Any words like “flammable”, “combustible”, “contains petroleum distillates”, or “breathing vapors may be harmful” usually mean solvents are present. Keep products in their original containers so that safety information and directions for use are always with the product.

- Keep products out of reach of children and pets.
- Buy products in amounts that you will use completely in a short period of time. Get rid of unused portions at household hazardous waste collections (they are often held in the spring). DO NOT throw solvents down drains, toilets, or storm drains. If disposed of improperly, solvents can pollute groundwater.
- Choose clothes that do not require dry cleaning.
- Take steps to prevent pest problems to reduce the need for pesticides.
- Look for products labeled “safe for septic”, or consider using natural or alternative products such as vinegar or baking soda solutions.