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Article type:

poison information

Access:

public



Pepper Spray and Chili Peppers

What is it:

Pepper spray is used in bear and dog repellents, personal defense sprays and in crowd control sprays (by law enforcement). Contains the oily resin from chili peppers (oleoresin capsicum) and a carrier solvent such as rubbing alcohol or a hydrocarbon.

Chili pepper is the common name for the fruit of the genus *Capsicum*. There are many peppers in this genus including jalapeno and cayenne. Used as a spice.

Is it toxic? Contact with the skin or eyes results in an intense burning sensation and possible redness. **Inhalation of pepper spray** results in irritation to the respiratory tract. Severity of symptoms depend on concentration, duration of exposure, and proximity to discharge.

Health Effects:

Eyes: Immediate stinging, burning sensation, tearing and redness. Symptoms usually subside once the eyes are rinsed.

Skin: Possible irritation, redness and a burning sensation.

Inhalation - Pepper spray: Burning sensation in the nose and throat, coughing, sneezing and a feeling that you can't catch your breath. Symptoms may be worse if exposure occurred in a confined space such as a small room or basement. People with asthma may have worsening of symptoms such as wheezing and shortness of breath.

Ingestion: Possible burning or stinging sensation in mouth, nausea and vomiting.

What to do:

Eyes: Rinse eyes with a gentle stream of lukewarm water for 5 minutes by any of the following methods:

- Pour a gentle stream of water from a jug or clean teapot over the eye from the inside corner by the nose, across the eye, flowing out towards the ear.
- Submerge eye in a container (bowl, sink) of lukewarm water. Have patient open and close eye.
- Eye may be irrigated in the shower, if this can be accomplished without delay.
- Young children may be wrapped like a mummy in a towel with arms at side and held over the sink or tub or laid on counter during flushing.

Skin: Pepper spray - Remove clothing and place in a plastic bag. Apply vegetable or cooking oil to the skin. Leave it on area for 5 or 10 minutes then wash off with soap and water. Can repeat this several times if needed. If only **on hands from chopping peppers**, fingers may be soaked in oil.

Inhalation: Get away from area where pepper spray was released. If exposure occurred indoors go outside and breathe fresh air. Open windows and doors to ventilate room. Inhalation of steam in a warm shower also provides relief of symptoms.

Ingestion: Rinse out mouth and drink a glass of water or milk. Sucking on ice chips may provide relief.

If symptoms persist after the above first aid measures contact the Poison Control Centre.

Clean up instructions: Wear gloves when cleaning contaminated surfaces and use a mild detergent such as dish soap. Launder contaminated clothes.

How can I prevent exposure? Keep out of reach of children and pets. Wear gloves when chopping chili peppers.

Need more information: Call the Poison Control Centre.

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Keywords:

capsaicin
pepper

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Source URL (retrieved on 2019-11-18 13:07): <http://www.dpic.org/faq/pepper-spray-and-chili-peppers>