

Understanding Chemical Warfare Agent (CWA) Exposure

The acronym **SLUDGEM**¹ is commonly used to describe the signs and symptoms of CWA exposure.

SALIVATION

LACRIMATION (WATERING OF THE EYES)

URINATION

DEFECACTION

GASTROINTESTINAL UPSET

EMESIS (VOMITING)

MIOSIS (PINPOINT PUPILS)

A chemical warfare attack could come without warning. Signs of chemical warfare agent exposure may include difficulty breathing; eye irritation; loss of coordination; nausea; or a burning sensation in the nose, throat, and lungs. Also, the presence of many dead insects or birds may indicate a CWA release.²

What to Do in a Chemical Warfare Attack³

If the release occurs indoors:

1. Locate clean air in any way possible. Leave the building if you can do so without passing through the contaminated area, or break a window to access clean air.
2. Undress by removing your outer clothing and placing it in a sealed bag.
3. Use large amounts of soap and water to wash your body. Flush skin with lots of water. Flush eyes with water if they are irritated. Use a skin decontaminant if available.
4. Dress with clean clothes if available.
5. Even if symptoms are not immediately present, seek medical attention if you believe you have been exposed.

If the release occurs outdoors:

1. Avoid any obvious plumes or vapor clouds.
2. After leaving the site of release, shelter-in-place inside a building away from the exposure with family and pets.
3. Once inside, lock all doors and close the windows, air vents, and fireplace dampers.
4. Turn off any fans, air conditioning, and forced air heating systems.
5. Go into a room with as few windows as possible. Seal the room to create a temporary barrier between you and the contaminated air outside.
6. Seal all windows, doors, and air vents with plastic sheeting and duct tape.
7. Use materials on hand to seal gaps to create a barrier from any contamination.
8. Watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet often for official news and instructions as they become available.

¹ From the National Association of EMS Physicians (NAEMSP), http://www.naemsp.org/medicalresponse/incident_ID_nerve.html

² From Ready.Gov and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), <https://www.ready.gov/chemical>

³ Adapted from the Chemical Attack fact sheet from the National Academies and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. To review in full, please visit https://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/prep_chemical_fact_sheet.pdf