

Guide to Pesticide Safety

in the United States

You have rights in the United States that help protect you from pesticides.

Foreign workers and workers without a valid permit have the same protections as United States citizens.

You have a right to:

- know and be warned that pesticides are used at your job;
- stay out of pesticide areas unless you are trained and given the right equipment;
- be trained how to use pesticides if you have to use them at work;
- get help from a doctor if you are hurt or exposed to pesticides;
- be taken by your employer to get medical help if you are hurt or exposed to pesticides at work.



What are pesticides?

Pesticides are chemicals used to kill bugs, weeds, and other pests.

Pesticides can hurt or kill you.

Pesticides can be anywhere on farms or in forests, nurseries, and greenhouses.

Pesticides can be in:

- plants, dirt or irrigation water;
- farm or irrigation equipment;
- places where pesticides are stored or have been stored;
- places where pesticides are loaded, mixed or thrown away;
- cars or trucks that carry pesticides;
- gear and equipment used to apply, mix or handle pesticides.

Cleanup sites

Your employer must provide you with a place to clean pesticides off your body and clothes.

This place is called a “cleanup site.”

A cleanup site is the same thing as a “decontamination site.”

The cleanup site must have enough:

- water to wash up;
- water to clean out your eyes;
- soap to clean off the pesticides;
- clean towels for workers to dry off.

If you do not have a cleanup site at your job or the cleanup site does not have enough water, soap or towels, then call 1-800-858-7378 or contact:

Office of Pesticide Programs
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
401 M Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20460
Tel: (703) 305-7666

What do pesticides look like?

Pesticides come in different shapes, sizes, and forms.

Pesticides can look like:

- a liquid that is sprayed or poured on plants and soil;
- a powder put on plants and soil;
- little pebbles, pellets, or grain;
- a gas or fog that is sprayed, let go, or injected into plants and soil.

What are my employer's responsibilities?

Your employer must:

- tell you if pesticides have been used on your job in the last 30 hours;
- train you in pesticide safety if pesticides are used where you work or if you must use pesticides;
- keep soap, water, and towels at your job if pesticides have been sprayed where you work in the last 30 days;
- train you how to use pesticides before you do any handling task or enter a field that has been treated with pesticides;
- tell workers and handlers where the signs, posters, and other pesticide information are located;
- allow workers and handlers access to the information;
- tell doctors the name of pesticides that have hurt workers;
- put up pesticide signs on places where pesticides are used or may drift on you;
- tell you to stay out of places that do not have pesticide signs up.



Signs and posters

Make sure you read all signs and posters.

Your employer must put up three kinds of signs or posters.

The three signs or posters are:

- pesticide signs (when a pesticide is used or about to be used);
- emergency information signs;
- pesticide safety posters (if pesticides are used at your job).

All signs must be placed where it is easy for you to see and read them.

The pesticide signs must:

- say where the pesticide will be used;
- describe the area treated with the pesticide;
- give the name of the pesticide;
- state the time and date the pesticide will be used;
- state how long you must wait to reenter the field;
- give the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registration number and active pesticide ingredients.

Emergency information signs must have the name, telephone number, and address of the nearest emergency medical facility

Pesticide safety posters must be:

- the Worker Protection Standard (WPS) safety poster or an equivalent poster;
- kept up-to-date by the employer.

If your employer violates these rules, call 1-800-858-7378.

How do I protect myself from pesticides?

The best way to stop pesticides from hurting you is to protect yourself.

Ask whether pesticides are used at your job.

Always read the label on the pesticide and follow all the safety rules.

Wear clothes to protect yourself.

Cover your skin with clothes like:

- Hat or cap
- Long-sleeved shirt
- Gloves
- Long pants
- Shoes and socks

Wash your hands and face before:

- Eating or drinking
- Touching another person
- Smoking
- Chewing gum or tobacco
- Using the toilet

You should:

- never put pesticides on yourself;
- stay out of places where pesticides are being used;
- get out of places where pesticides drift onto you;
- never take pesticides or pesticide containers home with you;
- wash your whole body and put on clean clothes after work;
- keep dirty work clothes away from family clothes before you wash them;
- keep children away from pesticides at all times.



Retaliation

Your employer cannot try to punish you because you protect yourself from pesticides.

Your employer cannot:

- stop or discourage you from following or trying to follow the law;
- fire you or do something against you because you tried to follow the law.

If this happens, call 1-800-858-7378.

You must be trained to work with pesticides

You must have special training to:

- Mix pesticides
- Load pesticides
- Apply pesticides
- Handle pesticides
- Work as a flagger
- Work in a place where entry is restricted

Special training includes *The Worker Protection Standard* materials developed by the EPA or the equivalent material in the *Criteria for Worker and Handler Training*.

If your employer makes you use pesticides, but does not give you training or the right equipment, call 1-800-858-7378.

How do I know if I have been harmed by pesticides?

Pesticides can be very dangerous, and they can harm you in many ways.

Pesticides harm both men and women.

Pesticides can:

- Hurt your nose
- Hurt your throat
- Hurt your eyes
- Cause rashes on your skin
- Cause your muscles to twitch
- Cause your urine to look smoky
- Cause your nose to run
- Cause your body to shake
- Cause your stomach to hurt
- Cause permanent brain damage
- Cause problems with seeing
- Cause problems with thinking
- Give you a headache
- Give you muscle pains
- Give you cramps
- Give you blisters
- Give you ulcers
- Give you a heart attack
- Make you feel sick
- Make you sweat a lot
- Make you feel dizzy
- Make you drool
- Make you have trouble breathing
- Make it hard for you to speak
- Make you confused

There is not enough room in this guide to list all the ways that pesticides can hurt you!



**Protect yourself
at all times and
follow all safety
rules!**

Pesticides can hurt you years later

Pesticides can hurt you months or years after they get on your skin or in your eyes, mouth or lungs.

Pesticides can:

- Give you cancer
- Hurt your kidneys
- Hurt your liver
- Hurt your nervous system
- Cause birth defects in your children

What do I do if I am harmed by pesticides?

If you think pesticides have hurt you, then go to a doctor right away.

Pesticides can hurt you if you get them on your skin, get them in your eyes, swallow them, or breathe them.

If pesticides get on your clothes

- Take off the clothes that have the pesticide on them.
- Get help right away.

If pesticides get on your skin

- Use water to rinse the pesticide off.
- Get help right away.

If you breathe pesticides

- Get away from the pesticides.
- Get fresh air.
- Get help right away.

If pesticides get in your eyes

- Hold your eyes open and rinse them with cool water for 15 minutes.
- Get help right away.

Also, take the pesticide label with you to the doctor if you can.

How do I help someone that is hurt by pesticides?

If someone else is hurt by pesticides, get help right away.

Call a poison control center or doctor, or get your employer.

Get the name of the pesticide if you can.

If someone gets sick from breathing a pesticide:

- get them to fresh air right away;
- loosen their clothing;
- if they are not breathing, give mouth-to-mouth (CPR).

Never try to rescue someone who has passed out in a greenhouse or other closed area unless you have special training and special breathing equipment.

Find someone who can help the sick person.

Medical help

If you are hurt by pesticides on the job, then go to the nearest hospital, clinic or doctor.

If you want to see a doctor because you think pesticides have hurt you, then go to the nearest hospital or call the National Center for Farm Worker Health hotline: 1-800-377-9968.

For information on pesticide products, call the National Pesticide Information Center: 1-800-858-7378.

For first-aid information, call the Poison Control Center: 1-800-222-1222.

You can also call the Migrant Clinicians Network for help at (512) 327-2017.



Commission for Labor Cooperation