

## FACT SHEET

# Health concerns around organophosphate pesticides

Exposure to organophosphate (OP) pesticides has been identified as a potential health risk.

Various sectors of the agricultural industry use OP pesticides. Exposure to OP pesticides may result in short term and long term health issues if not used safely. OP pesticides can be readily substituted, with a significant proportion of the industry already doing so.

### Exposure to OP pesticides

OP pesticides are easily absorbed by inhalation, through the skin, by ingestion, and through the mucous membranes and eyes, if not properly protected during use.

Workers with prolonged exposure to OP pesticides over several hours and consecutive days have the greatest chance of getting an illness related to pesticide exposure.

Health monitoring is an essential tool for the assessment of exposure to OPs.

Rural work activities that are likely to cause exposure to OP pesticides include:

- seasonal field work
- aerial crop spraying
- pest control operations
- grain storage
- mixing, loading and application of chemicals in horticultural and other industries
- veterinary practices such as sheep dipping.

### Symptoms

- Typical symptoms of short term exposure to OPs include headaches, excessive sweating, slurred speech and blurred vision.
- Long term exposure to OPs can cause weakness and behavioural effects like anxiety and restlessness.
- Effects on the nervous system (polyneuropathy) which can affect the upper limbs.
- Symptoms and signs reach their maximum severity 24-48 hours after onset and may usually regress over the next 1-6 days.

### Next steps

Prevention is better than cure. It is always better to be aware of the chemicals you are using and what symptoms to look for. Follow these simple steps:

- Talk to your employer.
- Read the safety data sheets (SDS) for each chemical you use.
- Substitute with less hazardous chemicals where possible.
- Talk to your doctor about:
  - your past and current occupations
  - any changes you have noticed in your body
  - your lifestyle – eg smoking can escalate symptoms
  - medical tests that may be required.

For more information, call 13 10 50 or visit [workcover.nsw.gov.au](http://workcover.nsw.gov.au).



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Information on the latest laws can be checked by visiting the NSW legislation website [legislation.nsw.gov.au](http://legislation.nsw.gov.au)

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