

This fact sheet answers the most frequently asked health questions (FAQs) about naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, and 2-methylnaphthalene. For more information, call the ATSDR Information Center at 1-888-422-8737. This fact sheet is one in a series of summaries about hazardous substances and their health effects. It is important you understand this information because these substances may harm you. The effects of exposure to any hazardous substance depend on the dose, the duration, how you are exposed, personal traits and habits, and whether other chemicals are present.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Exposure to naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene happens mostly from breathing air contaminated from the burning of wood, tobacco, or fossil fuels, industrial discharges, or moth repellents. Exposure to large amounts of naphthalene may damage or destroy some of your red blood cells. Naphthalene has caused cancer in animals. Naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, and 2-methylnaphthalene have been found in at least 687, 36, and 412, respectively, of the 1,662 National Priority List sites identified by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

### **What are naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, and 2-methylnaphthalene?**

Naphthalene is a white solid that evaporates easily. Fuels such as petroleum and coal contain naphthalene. It is also called white tar, and tar camphor, and has been used in mothballs and moth flakes. Burning tobacco or wood produces naphthalene. It has a strong, but not unpleasant smell. The major commercial use of naphthalene is in the manufacture of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastics. Its major consumer use is in moth repellents and toilet deodorant blocks.

1-Methylnaphthalene and 2-methylnaphthalene are naphthalene-related compounds. 1-Methylnaphthalene is a clear liquid and 2-methylnaphthalene is a solid; both can be smelled in air and in water at very low concentrations.

1-Methylnaphthalene and 2-methylnaphthalene are used to make other chemicals such as dyes and resins. 2-Methylnaphthalene is also used to make vitamin K.

### **What happens to naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, and 2-methylnaphthalene when they enter the environment?**

- ☐ Naphthalene enters the environment from industrial and domestic sources, and from accidental spills.
- ☐ Naphthalene can dissolve in water to a limited degree and may be present in drinking water from wells close to hazardous waste sites and landfills.
- ☐ Naphthalene can become weakly attached to soil or pass through soil into underground water.
- ☐ In air, moisture and sunlight break it down within 1 day. In water, bacteria break it down or it evaporates into the air.
- ☐ Naphthalene does not accumulate in the flesh of animals or fish that you might eat.

- ☐ 1-Methylnaphthalene and 2-methylnaphthalene are expected to act like naphthalene in air, water, or soil because they have similar chemical and physical properties.

### **How might I be exposed to naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, and 2-methylnaphthalene?**

- ☐ Breathing low levels in outdoor air.
- ☐ Breathing air contaminated from industrial discharges or smoke from burning wood, tobacco, or fossil fuels.
- ☐ Using or making moth repellents, coal tar products, dyes or inks could expose you to these chemicals in the air.
- ☐ Drinking water from contaminated wells.
- ☐ Touching fabrics that are treated with moth repellents containing naphthalene.
- ☐ Exposure to naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene and 2-methylnaphthalene from eating foods or drinking beverages is unlikely.

### **How can naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, and 2-methylnaphthalene affect my health?**

Exposure to large amounts of naphthalene may damage or destroy some of your red blood cells. This could cause you to have too few red blood cells until your body replaces the destroyed cells. This condition is called hemolytic anemia. Some symptoms of hemolytic anemia are fatigue, lack of appetite, restlessness, and pale skin. Exposure to large amounts of naphthalene may also cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, blood in the urine, and a yellow color to the skin. Animals sometimes develop cloudiness in their eyes after swallowing high amounts of naphthalene. It is not clear whether this also develops in people. Rats and mice that breathed naphthalene vapors daily for a lifetime developed irritation and inflammation of their nose and lungs. It is unclear if naphthalene

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causes reproductive effects in animals; most evidence says it does not.

There are no studies of humans exposed to 1-methylnaphthalene or 2-methylnaphthalene.

Mice fed food containing 1-methylnaphthalene and 2-methylnaphthalene for most of their lives had part of their lungs filled with an abnormal material.

### **How likely are naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene to cause cancer?**

There is no direct evidence in humans that naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene cause cancer. However, cancer from naphthalene exposure has been seen in animal studies. Some female mice that breathed naphthalene vapors daily for a lifetime developed lung tumors. Some male and female rats exposed to naphthalene in a similar manner also developed nose tumors.

Based on the results from animal studies, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) concluded that naphthalene is reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) concluded that naphthalene is possibly carcinogenic to humans. The EPA determined that naphthalene is a possible human carcinogen (Group C) and that the data are inadequate to assess the human carcinogenic potential of 2-methylnaphthalene.

### **How can naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene affect children?**

Hospitals have reported many cases of hemolytic anemia in children, including newborns and infants, who either ate naphthalene mothballs or deodorants cakes or who were in close contact with clothing or blankets stored in naphthalene mothballs. Naphthalene can move from a pregnant woman's blood to the unborn baby's blood. Naphthalene has been detected in some samples of breast milk from the general U.S. population, but not at levels that are expected to be of concern.

There is no information on whether naphthalene has affected development in humans. No developmental abnormalities were observed in the offspring from rats, mice, and rabbits fed naphthalene during pregnancy.

We do not have any information on possible health effects of 1-methylnaphthalene or 2-methylnaphthalene on children.

### **How can families reduce the risks of exposure to naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, and 2-methylnaphthalene?**

❑ Families can reduce the risks of exposure to naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, and 2-methylnaphthalene by avoiding smoking tobacco, generating smoke during cooking, or using

fireplaces or heating appliances in their homes.

❑ If families use naphthalene-containing moth repellents, the material should be enclosed in containers that prevent vapors from escaping, and kept out of the reach from children.

❑ Blankets and clothing stored with naphthalene moth repellents should be aired outdoors to remove naphthalene odors and washed before they are used.

❑ Families should inform themselves of the contents of air deodorizers that are used in their homes and refrain from using deodorizers with naphthalene.

### **Is there a medical test to determine whether I've been exposed to naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, and 2-methylnaphthalene?**

Tests are available that measure levels of these chemicals and their breakdown products in samples of urine, feces, blood, maternal milk, or body fat. These tests are not routinely available in a doctor's office because they require special equipment, but samples can be sent to special testing laboratories. These tests cannot determine exactly how much naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene you were exposed to or predict whether harmful effects will occur. If the samples are collected within a day or two of exposure, then the tests can show if you were exposed to a large or small amount of naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene.

### **Has the federal government made recommendations to protect human health?**

The EPA recommends that children not drink water with over 0.5 parts per million (0.5 ppm) naphthalene for more than 10 days or over 0.4 ppm for any longer than 7 years. Adults should not drink water with more than 1 ppm for more than 7 years. For water consumed over a lifetime (70 years), the EPA suggests that it contain no more than 0.1 ppm naphthalene.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) set a limit of 10 ppm for the level of naphthalene in workplace air during an 8-hour workday, 40-hour workweek. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) considers more than 500 ppm of naphthalene in air to be immediately dangerous to life or health. This is the exposure level of a chemical that is likely to impair a worker's ability to leave a contaminate area and therefore, results in permanent health problems or death.

### **References**

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). 2005. Toxicological Profile for Naphthalene, 1-Methylnaphthalene, and 2-Methylnaphthalene (Update). Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service.

**Where can I get more information?** For more information, contact the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Division of Toxicology, 1600 Clifton Road NE, Mailstop F-32, Atlanta, GA 30333. Phone: 1-888-422-8737, FAX: 770-488-4178. ToxFAQs Internet address via WWW is <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaq.html>. ATSDR can tell you where to find occupational and environmental health clinics. Their specialists can recognize, evaluate, and treat illnesses resulting from exposure to hazardous substances. You can also contact your community or state health or environmental quality department if you have any more questions or concerns.

