



Health Hazards of Solvents

A solvent is a substance used to dissolve or dilute another substance. The most common solvent is simple water. Solvents can be used for cleaning and degreasing; they may be in glues and lubricants; they're used in paints, coatings, and sealants. Many substances on the jobsite can only be diluted or cleaned with toxic chemicals that can also dissolve other substances like skin. Solvents present many hazards for anyone who uses them or works near them.

Solvents can enter your body in three ways:

1. Inhalation - Many solvents evaporate quickly. If you inhale the airborne fumes, gases, or vapors, they can then pass into your bloodstream.
2. Ingestion - If you don't follow proper hygiene when working with solvents, you may ingest solvents by eating, drinking, or smoking with contaminated hands.
3. Skin Absorption - Solvents can also enter your body directly through your skin when you come into contact with them.

The health effects of solvents depend on the solvent, the length and type of exposure, and the amount of solvent that enters your body. But keep in mind that a single exposure can be deadly. Exposures can result in acute (immediate or short-term) problems such as nausea, headaches, drowsiness, dizziness, and dry or cracked skin. Exposures may also cause chronic (long-term) conditions like cancer, brain and nervous system disorders, liver damage, kidney damage, and infertility.

Protect yourself from the hazards of solvents by:

- Knowing what chemicals you are using.
- Reading the Safety Data Sheet carefully before beginning your work.
- Understanding the health effects of the substance you work with.
- Knowing what to do in case of a spill.
- Substituting less-dangerous products for the harmful solvents you use.
- Wearing and using proper personal protective equipment. This can include protective clothing, gloves, eye protection, boots, and respiratory protection.
- Making sure your work area has lots of ventilation with plenty of fresh air.
- Avoiding skin contact with any solvent.
- Practicing good hygiene after you work with a solvent.
- Storing solvents as indicated in their Safety Data Sheets (SDSs).
- Making sure that solvents are properly labeled.
- Knowing how to dispose of the chemical safely.



SAFETY REMINDER

If your eyes come into contact with a solvent, flush them with water for at least 15 minutes and seek medical attention as soon as possible.