

Key Messages – Public Facing

March 1, 2023: CLEARED

As this is an evolving situation, please note that ATSDR's involvement and guidance may be updated over time as more information becomes available.

CDC/ATSDR Response

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) are working closely with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Ohio and Pennsylvania Departments of Health to assess the public health impact of the train derailment incident in East Palestine, Ohio.
- We sent a team to provide technical assistance and assess public health needs. We have already begun assisting the Ohio and Pennsylvania health departments with conducting a rapid assessment known as an [Assessment of Chemical Exposure \(ACE\)](#) investigation.
- We are working to learn more about how the chemicals released during and after the train derailment may have affected the health of anyone who was exposed to the chemicals.
- While CDC/ATSDR has information about many types of chemicals that may get into the environment and how they may affect people, there is still a lot we are trying to learn.
 - As we learn more, we will share this information with you.
- We are also helping the Ohio and Pennsylvania Departments of Health and healthcare workers. We are giving them information about these chemicals so they can better help their patients.

ACE

What is an Assessment of Chemical Exposures Investigation (also called an “ACE investigation”)?

- [ACE investigations](#) are rapid assessments that state health departments conduct with help from ATSDR. An ACE investigation assesses how a chemical release may affect individuals and the community.
- During an ACE investigation, the team interviews people who may have been exposed to the chemicals of concern. The team collects detailed information on exposure history, symptoms experienced, medical history, and health services used.
- Information that the team gathers can help public health responders understand how the derailment incident is impacting the health of residents in the affected communities and inform decision making.

How long does it take to do an ACE investigation?

- It typically takes two to three weeks to collect the surveys. ATSDR will provide initial recommendations to state health departments after information is gathered from the surveys. A full report summarizing findings will be published 3-4 months after this. The information will be

used to better understand the health impacts of this event and to determine next steps. ATSDR began collecting ACE survey data on 2/21/23.

Who can participate in the ACE health assessment survey? How can I participate?

- ACE surveys are being conducted in person at the health assessment clinic in Ohio and health resource center in Pennsylvania. Residents can also learn more about taking the survey online.
- ACE teams are also going door-to-door to complete surveys or leave door tags about the ACE survey if there is no answer.

Exposure to Chemicals

What does exposure mean?

Chemicals are found in common materials around us: paints, fuels, cleaning solutions, and substances used to dilute or thin other ones.

You may come into contact with chemicals in the environment if they are not stored or disposed of properly.

- This is called chemical exposure.
- Chemicals can also be released into your environment naturally or through leaks, spills, and man-made disasters.
- Some chemicals are hazardous—they can harm you.
- Other chemicals cause no harm.

Do all people experience the same effects or get sick the same way when they come in contact with a dangerous chemical?

People's bodies respond to chemicals differently. Some people may get sick from an exposure to a chemical, while others may not. Some sicknesses would be caused only if you were exposed to a chemical for a long time. The healthier you are, the better your body can protect you.

Other factors that play a part in whether you may get sick include:

- The type of chemical you were exposed to
- The amount of a chemical you were exposed to
- How long the contact lasted
- How often you came into contact with a chemical
- How the chemical entered your body
- Your general health and any preexisting health conditions
- Some people may be more sensitive to a chemical and can get sick from an exposure, including children, pregnant women, and people with underlying medical conditions.

How do chemicals get into your body?

To be exposed to a harmful chemical, you must breathe, eat, drink, or touch it.

Breathing (or inhalation):

- Chemicals are found as gases, vapors, aerosols, and fibers that you breathe in with air.
- When chemicals reach the lungs, they can affect the lungs directly, or travel to other parts of the body through the blood stream.

Eating and drinking (or ingestion):

- Food or drinks may have chemicals on or in them that can enter your body.
- These chemicals are absorbed by your body, or taken in, by the digestive system.

Touching:

- You can have contact with chemicals through your skin or eyes.
- Chemicals can enter your bloodstream through the pores, small cracks, or cuts in your skin.
- Other chemicals may irritate or burn your skin. This can lead to infection.
- Some chemicals may enter your body through your eyes and burn or irritate them.

Can chemical odors make me sick?

Everyone reacts to odors differently.

- Some people are more sensitive to environmental odors than others.
- When you are more sensitive to an odor, you may have symptoms even if not much (or a low concentration) of the odor is in air.
- In general, when there is more of a chemical in the air, more people will have symptoms.
- Toxicity depends on what the substance is and the amount (concentration) in the air you breathe, how often (frequency) you breathe that air, and how much time (duration) you spend breathing that air.
- If the odor's level in air is high, happens often, and lasts a long time, it is more likely to cause health problems.

Disproportionately Affected Populations

Some people may be more sensitive to a chemical and can get sick from an exposure. This includes children, pregnant people, and people with underlying medical conditions.

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- The amount of a chemical you were exposed to
- How long the contact lasted
- How often you came into contact with a chemical
- How the chemical entered your body
- Your general health and preexisting conditions

People who are breastfeeding

If you are breastfeeding and live in the area affected by the train derailment in East Palestine:

- Follow local guidance to minimize and avoid your exposure to chemicals.

- Continue to breastfeed. Breastfeeding is recommended despite potential exposure to chemicals. The benefits of breastfeeding outweigh the potential risk of exposure to chemicals through breast milk for most infants.
 - While most of the chemicals involved in the spill (or that would have formed in the burn-off) can irritate the respiratory tract and eyes, those chemicals are very unlikely to enter breast milk.
- If you have concerns about water from your private well, private well testing is available through OH EPA.

People who are pregnant

People who are pregnant may be sensitive to chemical exposure because of physiological changes associated with pregnancy that may increase exposure through breathing (inhalation) or eating (ingestion). This is because when you are pregnant your respiratory rate may increase, causing you to breathe in more of the chemicals. Also, when you are pregnant, your digestion may be slower (slowed gastrointestinal motility). Keep in mind that, even if you were exposed to chemicals, you may not become ill.

If you are pregnant and live in the area affected by the train derailment in East Palestine:

- Follow local guidance on food and water safety to avoid chemical exposure.
- If you have concerns about water from your private well, private well testing is available through OH EPA.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about common signs and symptoms related to chemical exposures.
 - Let them know if you have a history of chemical exposure.
 - Ask them to follow recommendations for treating symptoms if they are evaluating your symptoms for chemical exposure and related illness.

Children

Emergencies can affect children differently than adults.

Children's bodies are different from adults' bodies.

- They are more likely to get sick or severely injured.
- They are more likely to lose too much body heat.
- They spend more time outside and on the ground. They also put their hands in their mouths more often than adults do.

Children need help from adults in an emergency.

- They don't fully understand how to keep themselves safe.
- They may not be able to explain what hurts or bothers them.
- They are more likely to get the care they need when they have parents or other caregivers around.

Mental stress from a disaster can be harder on children.

- They feel less of a sense of control.

- They understand less about the situation.
- They have less experience in bouncing back from hard situations.

Region 5 Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units (PEHSUs)

The Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units (PEHSUs) are a national network of experts in the prevention, diagnosis, management, and treatment of health issues from environmental exposures, from preconception through adolescence.

Each PEHSU is based at an academic health institution (such as a university) with experts in pediatrics, allergy/immunology, neurodevelopment, toxicology, occupational and environmental medicine, nursing, reproductive health, and other specialized areas. PEHSUs work together to address any reproductive and children’s environmental health issue that affects families and communities, including safer disinfectant use (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic), wildfire smoke, PFAS, lead, pesticides, mold, chemical spills, and many more.

Health Concerns

Poison Control

If you are experiencing symptoms or have health concerns, please contact your healthcare provider or call the dedicated Poison Control East Palestine Support Line at 877-603-0170 or visit the [Poison Control](#) website.

OH Health Assessments & PA Resource Center

- Ohio Department of Health, Columbiana Ohio County Health Department, and Department of Health and Human Services are offering free health assessments to residents who have medical questions or concerns. Call to schedule an appointment: (234) 564 – 7755 or (234) 564 – 7888.
- The [Pennsylvania Department of Health \(DOH\)](#) is opened a health resource center on Tuesday, February 28 at the Darlington Township Building, 3590 Darlington Road, Darlington, PA 16115. The Center will be open weekdays from 10:00 AM to 8:00 PM, and is scheduled to operate through March 10.

Mental Health, Stress, & Coping

It is natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief, and worry during and after an emergency.

There are resources available to help:

- For immediate assistance, CALL or TEXT the [Disaster Distress Helpline](#) at 1-800-985-5990 (press 2 for Spanish).
- Ohio’s CareLine can offer free, confidential, and emotional support with a trained specialist. Call 1-800-720-9616 to connect.

For more information on managing stress, visit:

- [Community Stress Fact Sheet | ATSDR \(cdc.gov\)](#)

- [Coping with a Disaster or Traumatic Event \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov)

Biomonitoring

What is biomonitoring?

- Biomonitoring is when a laboratory tests a sample from the body, usually blood or urine, to look for a chemical or some marker of exposure to that chemical.
- Biomonitoring may help show what chemicals are getting into people's bodies, and in what amounts. It may also be used to see if public health actions are working to lower people's exposure to a chemical.

When is biomonitoring performed?

Public health officials may recommend collecting blood or urine from people after a possible chemical exposure. They will do this if the results of testing will help

- Decide that an exposure occurred,
- Decide if people's symptoms are because of exposure
- Predict future health problems, or
- Manage symptoms or a health problem.

How do public health officials decide if biomonitoring could help?

- They check if the chemical(s) in the environment is at higher-than-normal levels or above an established level of concern and if people could come into contact with it. If the amount of exposure to the chemical was small or did not last long, a laboratory test might not be able to detect the chemical in the body.
- They consider if the chemical(s) is known to be harmful to people's health. Finding a chemical in a person's blood or urine alone does not tell us if it caused or will cause a health problem.
- They review what happens to the chemical(s) when it gets in a person's body and how fast it leaves. Some chemicals enter the body and disappear in hours or a few days. So, testing blood and urine collected after that time will not find them.
- They determine if there is a reliable laboratory test for the chemical(s) of concern and if the test is specific for the exposure event. Laboratory tests are not available for all chemicals or may indicate exposure to other chemicals. Also, people may be exposed to the chemical(s) of concern in other ways, such as at their job or through daily activities (like cigarette smoking). A blood or urine test would not be able to say if the exposure came from a particular event.

Cleaning

Cleaning is an important first step to make sure you remove chemicals from surfaces in your home. Using household cleaners that contain soap or detergent will remove many contaminants from surfaces. We recommend that you wipe down any surfaces that could have been exposed to chemicals, including anything used for the preparation or eating of food, any children's or infant's toys, anything touched frequently, such as light switches, remotes, etc. After cleaning, always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.

For hard surfaces, such as counters, certain toys, light switches, and floors:

Clean surfaces with soap and water or with cleaning products appropriate for use on the surface.

For soft surfaces such as carpet, rugs, and drapes:

- Clean the surface with cleaning products appropriate for use on these surfaces.
- Launder items (if possible) according to the manufacturer's instructions. Use the warmest appropriate water setting and dry items completely.
- Vacuum surfaces (such as carpets and rugs) and dispose of the dirt safely.
- Out of an abundance of caution, while vacuuming, you may air out your home, vacuum small amounts at a time, and/or take frequent breaks by walking outdoors.

For laundry items, such as clothing, towels, cloth toys, and linens:

- Launder using detergent and recommended water temperature.
- Dry items completely.
- Clean clothes hampers or laundry baskets according to guidance for surfaces.

Who should I call if I have questions about air monitoring, water sampling, or cleaning services for my home?

Call [EPA's East Palestine](#) information line at 1-866-361-0526. The line is open from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM (Eastern Time). The hotline will help provide various services, including guidance for accessing ongoing air monitoring, water sampling, as well as information about scheduling cleaning services.

Additional Resources:

For information about the train derailment response in East Palestine, Ohio, visit the following resources:

- [Poison Control](#)
- [U.S. EPA Response – East Palestine Train Derailment](#)
- [East Palestine Train Derailment | Ohio Department of Health](#)
- [Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection – East Palestine Train Derailment Information](#)
- [Train Derailment Dashboard \(pa.gov\)](#)

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