

EXPOSURE TO HAZARDOUS CHEMICALS

The most common hazardous chemicals in the health sector include cleaning and disinfecting agents, sterilants, mercury, toxic drugs, pesticides, latex and laboratory chemicals and reagents.



Key facts

- ✓ Disinfectants, cleaning products, sterilants, anaesthetic gases, mercury, hazardous drugs and pesticides used in health-care settings may be harmful to health workers.
- ✓ Cleaning agents and disinfectants have been associated with a 67% increased risk of new-onset asthma in nurses.
- ✓ Bleach and glutaraldehydes have been associated with double the risk of asthma in nurses.

Preventive measures:

- ✓ Eliminate unnecessary chemicals or substitute with equally effective and less toxic chemicals.
- ✓ Ensure adequate ventilation and use of closed systems when handling chemicals.
- ✓ Provide medical surveillance and regular training for workers handling chemicals.
- ✓ Use mercury free medical equipment, limit the use of dental amalgam and safely dispose or return medical devices containing mercury to the manufacturer.
- ✓ Apply safe work procedures for handling, storage, transportation and disposal of all chemicals according to the recommendations of the manufacturer.
- ✓ Provide facilities for personal hygiene including washing and changing clothes.
- ✓ Ensure safe disposal of empty or nearly empty pesticides containers.
- ✓ Organize first aid and emergency care procedures in case of accidental exposures.
- ✓ Provide and ensure usage of appropriate well fitted personal protective equipment.

Source:

<https://www.who.int/tools/occupational-hazards-in-health-sector/exposure-to-hazardous-chemicals>

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<https://www.who.int/activities/protecting-health-and-safety-of-health-workers>

