

Touching benzene

Unless you work in a factory, it's not likely that you will ever see or touch pure benzene. However, if you live near a gas station or near a place where oil has spilled, you could find dirt and water that is contaminated with benzene. You should avoid going near areas that have been contaminated with oil and avoid touching dirt or water that has oil in it.



If you get crude oil or gasoline on your skin, wash it off as soon as possible using a mild soap. The benzene in crude oil or gas could cause a rash and dry, itchy skin.

Health effects of benzene



Short-term health effects*:

- headache
- coughing
- nausea
- wheezing
- watery eyes
- sleepiness
- stuffy nose
- dizziness
- irritated throat

Long-term health effects of benzene:

- your body won't be able to fight off germs as easily
- you could get cancer

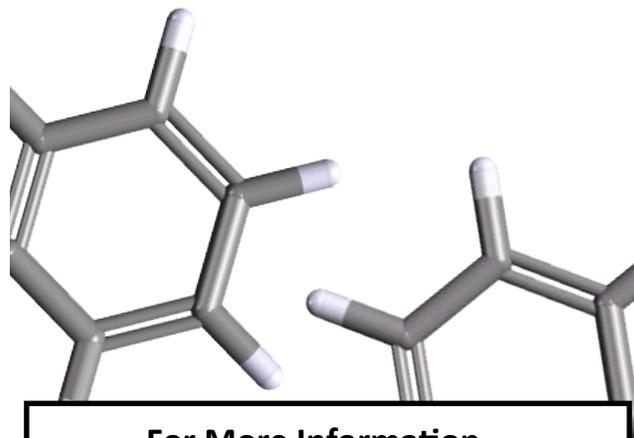
* Many chemicals, not just benzene, can cause these types of health symptoms. The symptoms are temporary and will go away when you're no longer around the chemicals.

Concerned about your health?

If you think you may have been exposed to benzene and have questions about your health, please call your doctor.

You can also call the Poison Control Center for free, 24 hours a day, at 1-800-222-1222.

If you are experiencing serious health problems, seek immediate medical care or call 911.



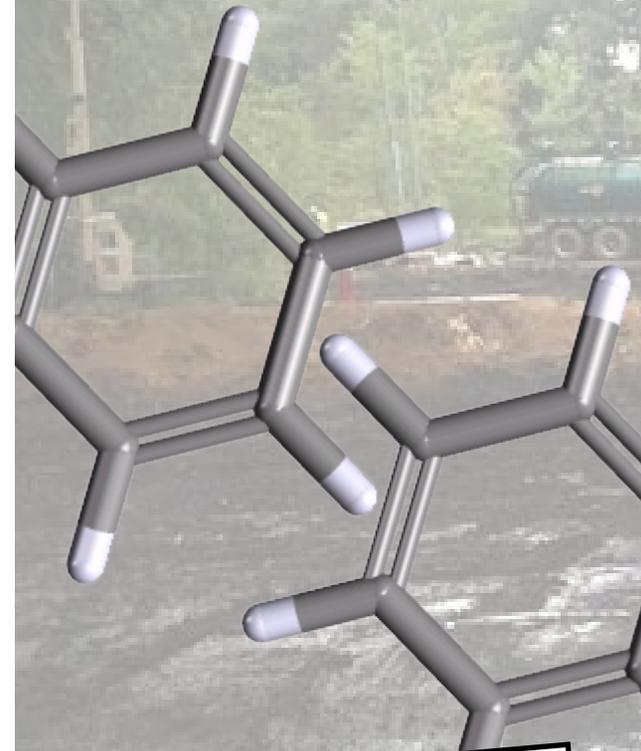
For More Information...

For other questions about benzene, contact:
MDCH Division of Environmental Health
1-800-648-6942

Michigan Department
of Community Health



Benzene



What is benzene?

- Benzene is a chemical used to make plastics, nylon, dyes, glues, and paint.
- Benzene can be found in gasoline and crude oil.
- Benzene is harmful to the health of people and animals.

How could I be exposed to benzene?

There are three ways you could come into contact with benzene:

- by breathing it in
- eating or drinking it
- touching it

Breathing benzene

Many things can add benzene to the air you breathe.



Outdoors, people can be exposed to low levels of benzene in areas where there is traffic, near gas stations, and from cigarette smoke.

Forest fires and other burning materials can put small amounts into the air, too.

Even the air inside your home can contain benzene, especially if you smoke cigarettes indoors, have recently painted, or have purchased items that had been put together with certain types of glue.



If you're near a crude oil spill or work in a factory that uses benzene, you might be exposed to high levels that can be very dangerous.

Benzene smells sweet. However, benzene is often mixed with other chemicals. You will most likely smell the other chemicals before you will smell benzene.



Scientists use special equipment to test the air where benzene might be a problem. This equipment can detect harmful chemicals, like benzene, at levels that are too low to smell.

Eating or drinking benzene

You can be exposed to benzene by drinking or using water that has been contaminated by underground fuel storage tanks, oil spills or nearby hazardous waste sites.



City Water

Municipal (city) water is tested often for many types of contaminants. Benzene would be found quickly if it ended up in city water.

Well Water

Private wells need to be tested by the homeowner. The U.S. CDC suggests that people who have wells test their water once a year for things like coliform bacteria, nitrates, total dissolved solids, and pH levels.

Homes with wells that are near a hazardous waste site, gas station, a factory, or an area where oil has spilled, may want to test their water more often and for more things, including chemicals like benzene.



Your local health department can help you find out what you should be testing for, and how often.

If a crude oil spill or fuel tank leak occurs, the type of soil and rock around your well will determine whether or not chemicals end up in your well water and how long it will take them to get there.

Groundwater Model

