Michigan Department of Health & Human Services

Cobalt

What is cobalt?

- Cobalt is an element naturally found in rocks, soil, water, plants and animals.
- Cobalt is part of vitamin B12. People need vitamin B12 to stay healthy.
- Cobalt is also used in some metal products.

How can cobalt harm people's health?

- Cobalt is usually not harmful, but high amounts can increase the risk of health effects, including:
  - Harm to the lungs, including asthma, shortness of breath and wheezing.
  - Impaired thyroid function.
  - Skin discoloration.
  - Changes in blood cell count.
  - Eye irritation.
  - Lung, breast, oral, throat and esophageal cancer.

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How are people exposed to cobalt?	How can people reduce their exposure to cobalt?
Drinking water containing cobalt.	Test private drinking water wells for cobalt. • To learn more about testing and maintaining private wells visit EH.Michigan.gov/CareforMiWell, call the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services at 800-648-6942 or contact your local health department. Public drinking water may be tested for cobalt, but it is not required. • For reports on public water supplies, check the United States Environmental Protection Agency's Consumer Confidence Reports (CCRs) at EPA.gov/CCR or contact your local water utility.
Eating food or supplements containing cobalt or vitamin B12. Everyday foods can have cobalt in them. 	There is no need to reduce your exposure to cobalt found in everyday food. Clean produce well. Peel the outer skin from root vegetables (e.g., carrots, beets, turnips) to remove dirt. Talk with your health care provider before taking any supplements. They can help you determine which, if any, you need. Do not take more supplements than suggested on the product label or by a doctor.
Smoking or vaping. Breathing secondhand smoke or vape aerosols.	Avoid breathing in smoke or vape aerosols. For help quitting smoking, call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669).
Breathing or swallowing cobalt during jobs or other activities, such as: • Using hard metal tools to drill, cut or grind stone or concrete. • Making rechargeable batteries. • Metal mining. • Smelting, refining or processing cobalt metal, alloys or ores. Breathing dust or accidentally swallowing soil containing cobalt.	When doing jobs or other activities with possible exposure to cobalt: • Wash your hands often, especially before eating or drinking. • Shower after working. • Use personal protective equipment. • Ensure good ventilation. • Do not eat, drink, smoke or vape in your workspace. Dust and vacuum your home often.

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