Michigan Department of Health & Human Services

Arsenic

What is arsenic?

- Arsenic is an element naturally found in soil, water and food.
- Arsenic is also in the environment because people used it in consumer products. In the past, arsenic was used as a pesticide and to preserve wood. These practices have mostly been phased out in the United States.
- There are different kinds of arsenic: inorganic and organic.
  - Inorganic forms of arsenic can be harmful to health. This type of arsenic can be found in soil, water, wood, rice and cigarettes.
  - Organic forms of arsenic are less harmful. This type of arsenic can be found in fish, seafood and seaweed.

How can arsenic harm people's health?

Inorganic Arsenic

- Eating food or drinking water containing arsenic over time can cause health problems, such as:
  - An increased risk of lung, bladder, kidney, liver, skin and prostate cancers.
  - Thickening and discoloration of the skin.
  - Damage to the nervous system. The damage causes a "pins and needles" feeling in hands and feet.
  - Changes in blood vessels, high blood pressure and heart disease.
- Breathing arsenic may cause:
  - Nausea.
  - Thickening and discoloration of the skin that may lead to skin cancer.
  - An increased risk of lung cancer.
- During pregnancy, exposure to high levels of arsenic over time can cause health problems in fetuses.

Organic Arsenic

- Exposure to this type is unlikely to harm people's health.

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How are people exposed to arsenic?	How can people reduce their exposure to arsenic?
Drinking water containing arsenic.	Test private drinking water wells for arsenic. • 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. Learn about results from arsenic testing of public drinking water. • 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 containing arsenic. This includes foods like rice, fish, seafood and seaweed.	There is no need to reduce your exposure to the type of arsenic found fish, seafood and seaweed. Clean produce well. Peel the outer skin from root vegetables (e.g., carrots, beets, turnips) to remove dirt. Those who are pregnant and infants should limit consumption of rice-based cereals and fruit juices. Avoid brown rice syrup. Do not use rice milk as a substitute for breast milk.
Smoking. Breathing secondhand smoke.	Avoid breathing in smoke. For help quitting smoking, call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669).
Taking supplements containing arsenic. Some supplements may be contaminated with arsenic.	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.
Breathing or swallowing arsenic during jobs or other activities, such as: • Copper or lead smelting. • Pressure-treating wood. • Glass and electronics production. Breathing sawdust or smoke from using or burning older wood that was pressure-treated with chromated copper arsenate (CCA). Breathing dust or accidentally swallowing soil containing arsenic.	When doing jobs or other activities with possible exposure to arsenic: • 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. Avoid using or burning older wood that was pressure-treated with CCA. Do not use it for children's play areas or in food gardens. • To learn more, visit EH.Michigan.gov/CCAWood. Dust and vacuum your home often.
Breastfeeding is a way that infants can be exposed to small amounts of arsenic.	The benefits of breastfeeding outweigh the risks from arsenic. Experts say that breastfeeding is still the healthiest choice for feeding your baby.

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