Cadmium- ToxFAQs™

CAS # 7440-43-9

This fact sheet answers the most frequently asked health questions (FAQs) about cadmium. For more information, call the CDC Information Center at 1-800-232-4636. This fact sheet is one in a series of summaries about hazardous substances and their health effects. It is important you understand this information because this substance may harm you. The effects of exposure to any hazardous substance depend on the dose, the duration, how you are exposed, personal traits and habits, and whether other chemicals are present.

HIGHLIGHTS: Exposure to cadmium happens mostly in the workplace where cadmium products are made. The general population is exposed from breathing cigarette smoke or eating cadmium contaminated foods. Cadmium damages the kidneys, lungs, and bones. Cadmium has been found in at least 1,014 of the 1,669 National Priorities List (NPL) sites identified by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

What is cadmium?

Cadmium is a natural element in the earth's crust. It is usually found as a mineral combined with other elements such as oxygen (cadmium oxide), chlorine (cadmium chloride), or sulfur (cadmium sulfate, cadmium sulfide).

All soils and rocks, including coal and mineral fertilizers, contain some cadmium. Most cadmium used in the United States is extracted during the production of other metals like zinc, lead, and copper. Cadmium does not corrode easily and has many uses, including batteries, pigments, metal coatings, and plastics.

What happens to cadmium when it enters the environment?

- Cadmium enters soil, water, and air from mining, industry, and burning coal and household wastes.
- Cadmium does not break down in the environment, but can change forms.
- Cadmium particles in air can travel long distances before falling to the ground or water.
- Some forms of cadmium dissolve in water.
- Cadmium binds strongly to soil particles.
- Fish, plants, and animals take up cadmium from the environment.

How might I be exposed to cadmium?

- Eating foods containing cadmium; low levels are found in all foods (highest levels are found in leafy vegetables, grains, legumes, and kidney meat).
- Smoking cigarettes or breathing cigarette smoke.
- Breathing contaminated workplace air.
- Drinking contaminated water.
- Living near industrial facilities which release cadmium into the air.

How can cadmium affect my health?

Breathing high levels of cadmium can severely damage the lungs. Eating food or drinking water with very high levels severely irritates the stomach, leading to vomiting and diarrhea.

Long-term exposure to lower levels of cadmium in air, food, or water leads to a buildup of cadmium in the kidneys and possible kidney disease. Other long-term effects are lung damage and fragile bones.

How likely is cadmium to cause cancer?

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) have determined that cadmium and cadmium compounds are human carcinogens. The EPA determined that cadmium is a probable human carcinogen (group B1).

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How can cadmium affect children?

The health effects in children are expected to be similar to the effects seen in adults (kidney and lung damage depending on the route of exposure).

A few studies in animals indicate that younger animals absorb more cadmium than adults. Animal studies also indicate that the young are more susceptible than adults to a loss of bone and decreased bone strength from exposure to cadmium.

We don't know if cadmium causes birth defects in people. Studies in animals exposed to high levels of cadmium during pregnancy have resulted in harmful effects to the young. Young animals exposed to cadmium before birth have shown effects on behavior and learning. There is also some information from animal studies that high enough exposures to cadmium before birth can reduce body weights and affect the skeleton in the developing young.

How can families reduce the risk of exposure to cadmium?

- Do not allow children to play with batteries. Dispose of nickel-cadmium batteries properly.
- Cadmium is a component of tobacco smoke. Avoid smoking and smoking in enclosed spaces like inside the home or car in order to limit exposure to children and other family members.
- If you work with cadmium, use all safety precautions to avoid carrying cadmium-containing dust home from work on your clothing, skin, hair, or tools.
- A balanced diet can reduce the amount of cadmium taken into the body from food and drink.

Is there a medical test to determine whether I've been exposed to cadmium?

Cadmium can be measured in blood, urine, hair, or nails. Urinary cadmium has been shown to accurately reflect the amount of cadmium in the body.

The amount of cadmium in your blood shows your recent exposure to cadmium. The amount of cadmium in your urine shows both your recent and your past exposure.

Has the federal government made recommendations to protect human health?

The EPA has determined that exposure to cadmium in drinking water at concentrations of 0.04 milligrams per liter (0.04 mg/L) for up to 10 days is not expected to cause any adverse effects in a child.

The EPA has determined that lifetime exposure to 0.005 mg/L cadmium is not expected to cause any adverse effects.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has determined that the cadmium concentration in bottled drinking water should not exceed 0.005 mg/L.

The Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) has limited workers' exposure to an average of 5 $\mu g/m^3$ for an 8-hour workday, 40-hour workweek.

References

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). 2012. Toxicological Profile for Cadmium. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service.

Where can I get more information?

For more information, contact the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Division of Toxicology and Human Health Sciences, 1600 Clifton Road NE, Mailstop F-57, Atlanta, GA 30329-4027.

Phone: 1-800-232-4636

ToxFAQs™ Internet address via WWW is http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/index.asp

ATSDR can tell you where to find occupational and environmental health clinics. Their specialists can recognize, evaluate, and treat illnesses resulting from exposure to hazardous substances. You can also contact your community or state health or environmental quality department if you have any more questions or concerns.