CONDITION

Wart remover poisoning

Wart remover poisoning is harmful exposure to salicylic acid or other chemicals in products used to remove warts.

WHAT IT IS
Harmful exposure to chemicals in wart-removal products

BODY SYSTEM
Whole body, especially brain, lungs, kidneys, and skin

MAIN SYMPTOMS
Nausea, fast breathing, ringing ears, confusion

WHAT CAUSES IT
Too much salicylic acid or other remover chemicals

HOW IT IS DIAGNOSED
Exposure history, repeat salicylate levels, blood chemistry

MAIN TREATMENT
Decontamination, supportive care, alkalinization, sometimes dialysis

CAN IT BE CURED?
Yes - most recover with prompt treatment

IS IT AN EMERGENCY?
Sometimes - confusion, seizures, collapse, or severe breathing trouble

LONG-TERM OUTLOOK
Most recover; severe poisoning may cause lasting organ injury

Overview

Wart remover poisoning means becoming ill after exposure to a chemical used to remove warts. It is an injury caused by a product, not an infection or disease.

Many liquid, gel, and medicated plaster products contain salicylic acid. This chemical breaks down the thick outer layers of a wart. It is related to aspirin and can cause salicylate poisoning if enough enters the body.

Poisoning may happen after swallowing the product. It can also follow repeated or excessive use, especially over a large area, on damaged skin, or beneath a tight covering. A small amount can be more important in a young child because of the child's lower body weight.

Other wart removers work by freezing tissue. These products may contain pressurized, highly

flammable gases such as dimethyl ether and propane. They can injure the skin or eyes, cause a cold burn, or produce symptoms if their vapour is inhaled.

The exact risk depends on the product, amount, route of exposure, and person's symptoms. The container or ingredient list is therefore important when getting advice.

Symptoms

Symptoms can begin soon after exposure, but salicylate poisoning may develop over several hours. Repeated skin use can cause a slower, less obvious illness. Feeling well immediately after exposure does not always rule out a problem.

Salicylate poisoning may cause:

Severe poisoning can cause fever, low blood sugar, seizures, fluid in the lungs, loss of consciousness, or failure of the kidneys and other organs.

Skin exposure may cause burning, redness, peeling, blisters, or a painful chemical burn. Damage may extend beyond the wart if the product spreads onto healthy skin. A freezing product can leave the skin pale, numb, hard, blistered, or painful.

Eye exposure can cause immediate pain, watering, redness, blurred vision, and injury to the eye's surface.

Breathing concentrated vapour from an aerosol freezing product may cause coughing, headache, dizziness, drowsiness, or breathing difficulty. Heavy exposure in a poorly ventilated space can be dangerous.

- Nausea, vomiting, or stomach pain
- Fast or unusually deep breathing
- Ringing, buzzing, or reduced hearing
- Sweating, thirst, dizziness, or headache
- Restlessness, weakness, or poor coordination
- Confusion, unusual sleepiness, or agitation

Causes and risk factors

The most common cause is accidental swallowing or using more product than directed. Children may drink a liquid preparation or put a treated plaster in their mouth.

Topical salicylic acid can pass through the skin. Absorption is more likely when the product is

applied frequently, used over a large area, placed on broken or inflamed skin, or trapped beneath an airtight covering. Continuing to apply it despite significant irritation can increase the risk.

Other factors that may make poisoning more serious include:

A correctly used wart remover may still cause mild irritation at the treated spot. That is different from whole-body poisoning, although worsening pain, blistering, or spreading skin damage needs attention.

- Young age or low body weight
- Dehydration
- Kidney problems that slow salicylate removal
- Taking aspirin or another salicylate-containing product at the same time
- Difficulty following the label because of vision, memory, or reading problems
- Using a freezing aerosol near the face, flames, heat, or poor ventilation

Diagnosis

Diagnosis begins with finding out exactly what happened. A poison centre or medical team will need the product name, ingredients, strength, amount involved, time of exposure, how it entered the body, and any symptoms. Bring the container or a clear photograph of its label if it is safe to do so.

For a significant salicylic acid exposure, blood tests measure the salicylate level. The test may need to be repeated because the level can continue to rise after the first sample.

Other blood tests check acidity, salts such as potassium, blood sugar, and kidney function. These results matter because salicylates disturb the body's acid balance and can affect several organs. A blood salicylate number must be interpreted alongside the symptoms, timing, and laboratory results; one level alone does not describe the full risk.

An electrocardiogram may be used to check heart rhythm. A chest X-ray or other tests may be needed if there are breathing symptoms. Skin and eye injuries are diagnosed mainly by examination.

There is no salicylate blood test for a freezing-product exposure unless that product also contains a salicylate. In those cases, diagnosis is based on the product and the type of injury or symptoms.

Treatment and management

Contact a poison information service promptly after swallowing wart remover, using a large or uncertain amount, or developing symptoms after skin exposure. In the United States, Poison Control is available at 1-800-222-1222. Elsewhere, use the local poison centre or emergency service. Do not wait for symptoms before calling after a child swallows the product.

While getting advice:

Do not apply more chemicals, creams, or freezing treatments to an injured area unless advised. Activated charcoal should not be given at home.

Hospital treatment depends on the chemical and severity. It may include monitoring, intravenous fluids, correction of blood sugar and body salts, treatment of burns, and breathing support.

For salicylate poisoning, sodium bicarbonate may be given through a vein. It makes the blood and urine less acidic, helping keep salicylate away from the brain and helping the kidneys remove it. This requires close monitoring and is not a home treatment.

Hemodialysis may be needed for severe poisoning. This uses a machine to remove salicylate from the blood and correct dangerous changes in acidity and fluid balance. It may be considered when there are severe brain or lung symptoms, worsening kidney function, or poisoning that is not responding to other care.

- Do not make the person vomit or try to neutralize the chemical
- For skin exposure, remove contaminated clothing and rinse with running water
- For eye exposure, rinse gently with lukewarm water for 15 to 20 minutes
- After inhaling vapour, move into fresh air without entering an unsafe space
- Keep the product container available for identification

Complications

Most people recover when the exposure is recognized and managed promptly. The chance of complications rises with a larger exposure, delayed treatment, severe symptoms, or reduced kidney function.

Possible complications include:

Severe inhalation of aerosol chemicals can also affect breathing and heart rhythm. Freezing products may cause a cold burn deep enough to damage nearby tissue.

- Deep skin injury, infection, pigment changes, or scarring
- Damage to the eye's clear surface and lasting vision problems
- Dehydration and disturbed blood salts
- Low blood sugar, especially affecting the brain
- Kidney injury
- Fluid buildup in the lungs
- Seizures, coma, or other brain injury
- Dangerous acid buildup in the blood

Prevention

Most wart remover poisoning can be prevented, although no storage or handling method can remove every risk.

Keep products in their original, labelled containers and store them locked away from children. Do not transfer a liquid wart remover into a cup, bottle, or unlabelled container.

Read and follow the product instructions. Use it only on the number and size of warts allowed by the label. Avoid healthy, broken, infected, or very inflamed skin. Do not cover the area more tightly than directed or combine several wart treatments.

Products may have special restrictions for areas such as the face or genitals and for people with diabetes or poor circulation. Follow the label and seek professional advice before treating an uncertain growth. Skin cancer, corns, and other conditions can sometimes be mistaken for warts.

Use freezing aerosols in a well-ventilated place away from flames, cigarettes, sparks, and heat. Do not inhale the vapour or spray it near the eyes.

Wash your hands after applying a product unless the hands are being treated. Replace caps securely and discard used applicators or medicated plasters where children and pets cannot reach them.

Living with it and what to expect

Wart remover poisoning is usually a short-term event rather than a lifelong condition. Mild skin irritation may settle over several days after the product is removed. A chemical or cold burn can take longer to heal and may need wound care.

People treated for salicylate poisoning are monitored until symptoms improve, body acidity is stable, and salicylate levels are falling to a safe range. Recovery may take hours to several days, depending on the exposure and whether organs were affected.

Symptoms can sometimes worsen after an early normal assessment because salicylate is still being absorbed. Follow any instructions for repeat blood tests or observation, even if you begin to feel better.

After a serious exposure, follow-up may check kidney function, hearing, breathing, skin healing, or vision. Lasting problems are not expected after most mild exposures, but deep burns, major eye injuries, or severe organ damage can have longer effects.

Once the chemical has been removed from the body, poisoning does not keep returning on its own. Another episode requires another exposure. Before using wart treatment again, discuss safer options if the original problem involved dosing confusion, damaged skin, or a reaction to the product.

When to get medical help

Call emergency services now if the exposed person:

Contact a poison centre promptly after any swallowed wart remover, even if there are no symptoms. Also call after an uncertain amount, a large skin exposure, eye exposure, repeated overuse, or any ringing in the ears, fast breathing, vomiting, dizziness, or confusion.

Seek routine medical follow-up if a treated area remains very painful, keeps spreading, develops pus, or is not healing. Follow-up is also appropriate for continuing hearing changes, reduced urination, breathing symptoms, or vision problems after the immediate exposure has been assessed.

- Has severe trouble breathing, blue or grey lips, or chest pain
- Collapses, cannot be awakened, or becomes severely confused
- Has a seizure
- Develops rapidly worsening weakness or loss of coordination
- Has severe eye pain or sudden loss of vision
- Has extensive blistering or a deep burn

Common questions

Is wart remover poisonous if swallowed?

Yes. Many products contain concentrated salicylic acid, while others contain different irritating or pressurized chemicals. Swallowing any amount calls for prompt advice from a poison centre. Do not wait for vomiting, ringing ears, or other symptoms.

Can wart remover poison me through my skin?

It can, although this is less common than accidental swallowing. Risk increases with repeated use, large treated areas, broken skin, or airtight coverings. Stop using the product and get advice if you develop whole-body symptoms such as nausea, fast breathing, sweating, dizziness, or ringing ears.

What should I do if my child licked wart remover?

Remove the product, gently wipe or rinse the mouth, and call a poison centre immediately with the container in hand. Do not cause vomiting. Emergency services are needed for trouble breathing, seizures, collapse, or difficulty waking the child.

Does ringing in my ears mean salicylate poisoning?

Ringing or buzzing can be an early sign of too much salicylate, particularly when it follows wart remover exposure. It has other possible causes, so it does not confirm poisoning by itself. Contact a poison centre or medical service promptly.

Can a freeze-off wart remover cause poisoning?

Yes, but the hazards differ from salicylic acid. A freeze product can cause cold burns or eye injury. Inhaling concentrated vapour can cause dizziness, drowsiness, coughing, or breathing problems, and the propellant may be flammable.

Should I make someone vomit after swallowing wart remover?

No. Vomiting can cause further chemical exposure and may lead to choking. Do not give a home antidote or attempt to neutralize the product. Call a poison centre for instructions based on the exact ingredients.

Sources

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