

What is formaldehyde?

Formaldehyde is a colorless, strong-smelling gas used to make household products and building materials, furniture, and paper products. It is used in particleboard, plywood, and fiberboard.

What products contain formaldehyde?

Formaldehyde can be found in most homes and buildings. Formaldehyde is also released into the air from many products you may use in your home. Because formaldehyde breaks down in air, you may breathe it in from such products as

- carpet cleaner
- cosmetics,
- fabric softeners,
- fingernail polish and hardeners,
- gas cookers and open fireplaces,
- glue,
- household cleaners, and
- latex paint.

Burning cigarettes and other tobacco products also release formaldehyde.

Products give off different amounts of formaldehyde. For example,

- fingernail polish gives off more formaldehyde than do plywood and new carpet, and
- some paper products—such as grocery bags and paper towels—give off only **small** amounts of formaldehyde.

Our bodies even produce some formaldehyde, although only in small amounts.

Will I get sick if I breathe or touch formaldehyde?

You might not get sick if you breathe or touch formaldehyde, but if you have breathed or touched formaldehyde you may have symptoms such as

- sore, itchy, or burning eyes, nose, or throat;
- skin rash; or
- breathing symptoms such as chest tightness, coughing, and shortness of breath.

People who are more likely to get sick from being around formaldehyde are children, the elderly, and people with asthma.

Formaldehyde may affect children more than it does adults. If you think your child may have been around formaldehyde, and he or she has symptoms contact a doctor. You should also know that:

babies are not likely to get formaldehyde from breast milk, and
you may be more sensitive to formaldehyde if you have asthma.

Is there a test for formaldehyde in the body?

There are tests that can detect formaldehyde in your blood, urine, and breath. These tests will not tell you how much formaldehyde is in your body, and *these tests will not tell you if you will get sick or if you have formaldehyde in your body that was not produced by your body.*

If you think you may have been around formaldehyde and are having symptoms, talk with your doctor.

How can I learn more about formaldehyde?

You can consult one of the following:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Public Response Hotline (CDC):

- 800-CDC-INFO
- 888-232-6348 (TTY)
- E-mail inquiries: cdcinfo@cdc.gov

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), [Pocket Guide to Chemical Hazards](#)