

Light Crude Oil and Your Health

What is light crude oil?

Light crude oil is a mix of thousands of different chemicals, but it is mostly hydrogen and carbon. It comes out of the ground as liquid petroleum.

How does light crude oil spread?

When oil is spilled in the ocean, it spreads in the water, mostly on the surface. The oil slick formed may stay together, or it may break up in rough seas. Waves, currents, and wind spread the oil over large areas. A small part of the oil may dissolve in the water. The oil also can spread in the water, join with the water to form a thick substance that is like hair mousse, sink, or form into sticky tar balls.

What are the health threats of light crude oil?

For most people brief contact with a small amount of oil will do no harm. Some people are more sensitive to chemicals, including those found in crude oil. These people may develop a rash or skin irritation or have other allergic reactions.

Skin contact with crude oil that lasts a long time can cause skin reddening, swelling, and burning. The skin effects can get worse if the skin is exposed to the sun. Skin contact can also make you more likely to develop a rash or skin infection.

Light crude oil may also be irritating if it contacts your eyes.

Swallowing small amounts (less than a coffee cup) of oil will cause upset stomach, vomiting, and diarrhea, but is unlikely to have long-lasting health effects.

How can I avoid the health threats of light crude oil?

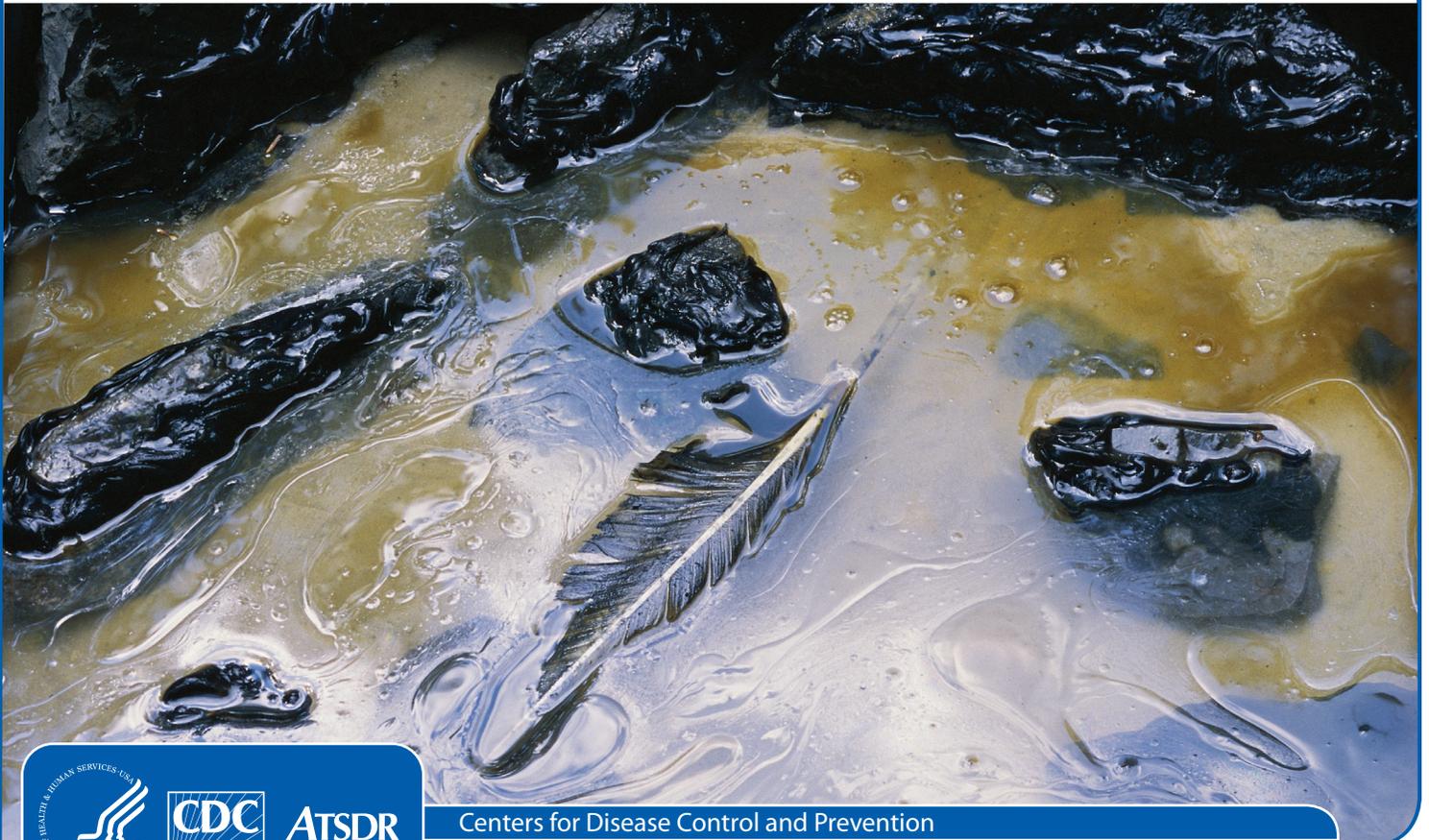
Avoid skin contact with oil. If you are involved in clean-up efforts, wear gloves, eye protection, and clothing that cover your arms and legs.

If you get oil on your skin, wash with soap and water, baby oil, petroleum jelly, or a cleaning paste for hands such as those sold at auto parts stores. Do not use solvents, gasoline, kerosene, diesel fuel, or similar products to clean oil off skin.

If you get oil in your eyes, flush them with water for 15 minutes.

If you swallow oil, do not try to vomit it, as this may get oil into your lungs.

If you inhale oil vapors, or smoke from burning oil, move to an area where the air is more clear. If you have inhaled a lot of vapor or smoke and feel short of breath, have chest pain or tightness, or dizziness, seek medical attention.



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