

Naphthalene in Moth Balls and Toilet Deodorant Cakes

What is Naphthalene?

Some moth balls and toilet deodorant cakes contain a substance called naphthalene. Naphthalene is a solid, white material with a distinctive odour, and it is found naturally in fossil fuels like coal and oil.

How can I be exposed to Naphthalene?

Naphthalene exposure can occur if you breathe air that contains naphthalene, if you drink liquids containing naphthalene, or if products containing naphthalene are touched or accidentally eaten. Be aware that you can also breathe in naphthalene vapours from clothes that have been stored in moth balls.

What effect can naphthalene have on health?

Exposure to very large amounts of naphthalene can cause damage to blood cells, leading to a condition called haemolytic anaemia. This condition has been seen in people, particularly children, after they have eaten moth balls containing naphthalene. Some of the symptoms that may occur after exposure to large quantities of naphthalene are fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhoea. The skin may become pale or yellow-coloured. Newborn babies are particularly at risk of damaging their blood cells if they are exposed to naphthalene. The damage to their blood cells releases a product (bilirubin) that makes the baby go yellow and in very severe cases can cause brain damage. Some people are born with a genetic blood condition (G6PD deficiency) which makes them more susceptible to the effects of naphthalene, so symptoms can be seen after exposure to even only small amounts of naphthalene. If any of these symptoms occur after exposure to naphthalene, you should immediately consult a doctor. There is no direct evidence that naphthalene can cause cancer in people.

How should naphthalene be used safely?

Moth balls containing naphthalene are generally safe for use around adults and older children, if used correctly and in the right quantity. Australian guidelines recommend that the use of naphthalene is restricted around children under three years of age. This means that children's blankets and clothes should not be stored with mothballs containing naphthalene, and moth balls should not be used in young children's rooms or in areas where young children may be present or have access to. If children's blankets and clothing have inadvertently been stored with naphthalene moth balls, they should be aired outdoors to remove any odour and washed before they are used.

It can be very dangerous if moth balls are eaten, so it is especially important that mothballs are stored well out of the reach of small children and pets.

Additionally, if you or one of your direct family members has been diagnosed with a genetic disorder of the blood, products containing naphthalene should be avoided.

Further advice concerning the health risks of naphthalene can be obtained 24 hours a day, 7 days a week Australia wide from the NSW Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26, or from local Public Health Units.

Metropolitan Areas	Location	Number	Rural Areas	Location	Number
Northern Sydney/Central Coast	Hornsby	02 9477 9400	Greater Southern	Goulburn	02 4824 1837
	Gosford	02 4349 4845		Albury	02 6080 8900
South Eastern Sydney/Illawarra	Randwick	02 9382 8333	Greater Western	Broken Hill	08 8080 1499
	Wollongong	02 4221 6700		Dubbo	02 6841 5569
Sydney South West	Camperdown	02 9515 9420		Bathurst	02 6339 5601
Sydney West	Penrith	02 4734 2022	Hunter/New England	Newcastle	02 4924 6477
	Parramatta	02 9840 3603		Tamworth	02 6767 8630
Justice Health Service	Matraville	02 9311 2707	North Coast	Port Macquarie	02 6588 2750
				Lismore	02 6620 7500

See full details of Public Health Units at www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/infectious/phus.asp

Interpreter Services

If you require assistance with contacting above services or translation, please call Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 13 14 50.

For other multilingual health information visit www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au