

## SUSPECTED RICIN FOUND IN MAIL NEAR THE PENTAGON

There is a mail gathering & screening facility adjacent but separate from the Pentagon, used to screen all mail going to the Pentagon. It was built after 9/11 to prevent mail from entering the Pentagon that may be a danger to personnel or put the building at risk.

On Monday, Oct 1, the Pentagon Force Protection Agency, which screens all the mail 24/7, detected a suspicious substance in two packages; one was addressed to Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis and the other to Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral John Richardson. The screening building and all the mail received that day were immediately quarantined. Because of the nature of their work, the screeners wear appropriate PPE, so no Pentagon or other Dept of Defense personnel were injured or exposed. No status report was made on whomever delivered the mail to the facility. Today, the FBI, which is the lead agency for this investigation, took control of the packages for further processing/testing. This was all confirmed by DoD officials and a Pentagon spokesman. Preliminary testing suggested that the packages contained Ricin. More definitive testing will confirm if the substance is Ricin or something else.

Ricin is a naturally occurring poison found in castor beans. It can be released by chewing and swallowing castor beans or developed from the left-over material after the castor oil has been removed. There are several ways to be exposed, most of them would require an intentional act, even if not by the victim. Ricin can be made into a powder, mist or pellet, or it can be mixed into water or a weak acid. It can be ingested, inhaled or injected under the skin. Ricin, once in the body, affects the cells by preventing proteins from being made, leading to death of the cells and then the organs & body systems.

The **risk of injury** from exposure depends on several factors:

1. **Purity and Dose** of the toxin
2. **Exposure time**
3. **Method** of the exposure with injection likely being the worst, and ingestion the least risky. Exposure with contact on the skin is not considered likely to injure but it can get on your hands, clothes or an object and then be transferred to your face, mouth, nose or eyes. The injection method would require someone using a device to force it under the skin and is the least likely.

**Signs & Symptoms** and **time to onset** vary by method of exposure:

1. **Inhalation:** occurs as early as 4-6 hours after exposure but can delay for up to 24 hours, and mostly affect the respiratory tract. Initial signs include cough, difficulty breathing/shortness of breath, and tight chest and then progresses, sometimes rapidly, to pulmonary edema (fluid in the lungs) and respiratory failure (the inability to keep breathing).
2. **Ingestion:** usually occurs within 6-12 hours and likely presents with GI symptoms such as abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, often bloody, and then, over the next 12-24 hours, may cause dehydration, kidney & liver failure.

Death may occur within 36-72 hours, based on the type and dose of exposure. Survival is possible, particularly for ingestion or skin contact. Treatment is supportive of symptoms. There is no antidote or specific treatment.

### Facts about Ricin:

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/agent/ricin/facts.asp>

### Questions & Answers about Ricin from the CDC and its Emergency Preparedness Division:

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/agent/ricin/qa.asp>

This document is provided by FirstWatch as a service to prehospital and public health providers. The information has been compiled from a variety of sources such as the CDC, Health Canada and WHO. It is copyrighted, but may be freely copied and distributed as long as it remains intact. For up-to-date, EMS specific information on emerging diseases, please visit [www.firstwatch.net/hi](http://www.firstwatch.net/hi)