

# Benzene

This aromatic hydrocarbon is widely used, mostly in paints, and prolonged exposure can cause leukemia

## ABOUT THE SUBSTANCE

Benzene is a colorless or light yellow liquid. It evaporates quickly and has a sweet odor. The vapor is heavier than air and is highly flammable. Benzene is widely used in the manufacture of paints and there goods and is one of the top 20 chemicals produced.

In the past benzene was produced from coal. Now it is made using petroleum for greater volume. It occurs in the environment from motor vehicle exhaust, industrial emissions, gasoline, and naturally from forest fires and volcanos. A common source of benzene exposure is from cigarette smoke.

## WHERE IS IT?

Benzene is found in ink, paint, finishes, plastic, rubber, gasoline and synthetic fibers such as nylon and polyester. It is used in the manufacture of detergents, pesticides, plastics, pharmaceuticals and explosives, and in the extration of oils.. Benzene is also used in dry-cleaning.

## EXPOSURE TO BENZENE

Humans can be exposed to the chemical through inhalation, consumption of food or water contaminated with benzene or through contact with the skin.

### Short-term exposure or consumption symptoms:

- Vomiting
- Stomach irritation
- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- Sleepiness
- Convulsions
- Headaches
- Tremors
- Confusion
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat
- Death (at very high levels)

### Long-term exposure health effects:

**Bone marrow damage** (loss of red blood cell production) including aplastic anemia

**Leukemia** (cancer of white blood cell-forming tissue)

**Immune system damage** (loss of white blood cell production)

**Reproductive and developmental damage** (may impair fertility in women and adversely affect the fetus)

