WHAT TO DO ABOUT

TEAR GAS

Chemical weapons are used by police to keep protesters under control, to dictate how we move and when we move, and prevent us from assembling the strength of our numbers. The most common crowd control weapons used today are tear gas (CS) and pepper spray (OC). Both are irritants, and although their short-term effects on our bodies are easy to control, their longer term effects on our bodies are more serious.

First Aid

- Stay calm. Panicking increases irritation. Breathe slowly and calmly walk to fresh air. Remember it is temporary.
- You must remove contact lenses or get someone to remove them for you, with clean, uncontaminated fingers. Destroy the lenses; they are not cleanable.
- Flush your eyes with milk or with water.
- Blow your nose, rinse your mouth with water or milk, cough and spit.
- Do not rub your eyes.
- Stand in fresh air, facing the wind.
- Help other people to stay calm, walk to fresh air, and remove their contact lenses.

Seek medical attention if:

- You have an asthma attack.
- You break out in a rash or experience persistent symptoms — the effects of tear gas and pepper spray are designed to be temporary. If you have persistent eye irritation, call an eye specialist.
- Seek medical attention if symptoms re-appear, worsen, or change.

Personal decontamination:

- Walk around in fresh air or a breeze with your arms outstretched.
- Remove contaminated clothing and place it in a sealed bag until it can be disposed of or washed.
- Take a cool shower (hot water can irritate your skin). Scrub with soap. Be careful not to get chemicals from your hair onto your face.
- Do not touch your eyes or your face, or other people, furniture, or carpets until you are clean.
Protect yourself:

- **Avoid** oils and lotions. They trap the chemicals against your skin, increasing exposure.
- **Minimize** skin exposure by covering up as much as possible. This also protects you from sun. Don’t forget a hat.
- If you have asthma or other breathing problems, chemical weapons may cause a severe attack. Carry your inhaler or avoid tear gas.
- **Don’t wear contact lenses.** They trap the chemicals against your eyes, which can cause permanent damage.
- If you get a warning (e.g. police are putting gas masks on), put on protective gear. Try to move away upwind.
  - Cover up skin with impermeable gear like a cheap plastic rain jacket. Most cloth will absorb the chemicals, increasing your exposure.
  - Wear goggles (with shatter-proof lenses). A respirator or even a wet bandanna over the nose and mouth will help. A bandanna wet with lemon juice or vinegar (apple cider vinegar is less irritating to people) counters tear gas better than a bandanna wet with water.

Who should avoid exposure?

Police behavior is unpredictable, and avoidance is not always possible. Be aware and try to avoid tear gas and pepper spray. People who have the following conditions should take extra care.

- respiratory diseases such as asthma, emphysema
- chronic health conditions or taking medications that weaken the immune system
- women who are pregnant or trying to get pregnant
- nursing mothers risk passing toxins on to their infant.
- skin and eye conditions

This information is provided by Chicago Action Medical and friends. Chicago Action Medical is a group of people dedicated to providing first aid at protests. For more tips or to get in touch, follow us on twitter @ChiStreetMedics