Chemical spills

Officials will tell you whether to stay in or leave. Pick the room and the plan before the alert comes.

HOW YOU HEAR ABOUT IT

- Listen to local radio or TV, a news app or text alerts, and follow local officials. Their instructions decide whether you leave or stay inside.

IF OFFICIALS SAY STAY INSIDE

- Bring pets in, lock doors and windows, and go to an inside room with few or no windows.
- Turn off fans, air conditioning and the furnace. If you have plastic sheeting and duct tape, seal windows, vents and the door. CDC says to use towels or sheets only if you have none.
- Stay until officials give the all clear, which may take a few hours or longer.

IF OFFICIALS SAY LEAVE

- Go right away by the route officials give you, and text a contact outside the area. Stay upwind if you can.
- In a car, keep windows and vents closed and turn off the heater and air conditioning. Do not go back until officials say it is safe.

IF YOU MAY HAVE BEEN EXPOSED

- Act within minutes. Taking off as much clothing as you can removes roughly 80 to 90 percent of the chemical. Cut off clothing that would go over your head, and seal it in a bag.
- Wash skin and hair with lukewarm water and mild soap for 2 to 3 minutes, without scrubbing. Flush burning eyes with water for 10 to 15 minutes.
- Call Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 or 911 if you have symptoms or cannot get it off. Do not induce vomiting.

CHILDREN AND PETS

- Clean yourself first, then wear a mask and gloves and repeat the steps for your child. Avoid an affected school.
- Take pets with you if you leave, or keep them inside with you if you stay.

BEFORE IT HAPPENS

- Pick your shelter room ahead of time, and ask your county about its Local Emergency Planning Committee, which plans for chemical accidents.

For our household

Our shelter room

Our alert source

Poison Control and county emergency office

Where we would go if told to leave

Sources: Ready.gov, Hazardous Materials Incidents; CDC, Chemical Emergencies (shelter in place, evacuation, getting clean, pets, children); EPA, Local Emergency Planning Committees. Checked October 2026. Sources differ on details like sealing a room, so follow local officials first.