

# Basic Facts About Benzene

Benzene is a widely used chemical formed from both natural processes and human activities. It is present in crude oil, gasoline, and cigarette smoke and occurs naturally in forest fires and volcanoes. Industries use it to make other chemicals like styrene Styrofoam®, resins, nylon, and other plastics. They also use benzene to make dyes, detergents, and pesticides.

In Los Angeles County, people are most often exposed to benzene through:

## Outdoor Air



Benzene may be found in higher levels near gas stations, auto exhaust, near businesses that make benzene or use it, and near landfills.

## Indoor Air



Benzene may be found in indoor air if products like cigarettes, glue, laundry detergent, furniture wax, or pesticides are used in the home.

## Soil Vapors (gases)



Benzene may come out from the ground through soil vapors (gases). Those soil vapors may come from businesses that make or use it and from underground tanks or landfills. People can breathe it in when vapors enter indoor spaces from contaminated soil or groundwater under homes and buildings.

## Work Sites

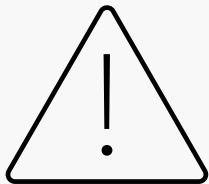


Benzene may be released in higher levels near or at industries that use the chemical to make rubber, paint, petroleum, and other chemicals.

## How Does Benzene Affect Health?

- Breathing in high levels of benzene over a short period of time can cause headaches, confusion, drowsiness, dizziness, and rapid heart rate.
- Breathing in benzene over a period of many years can harm bone marrow and cause a decrease in red blood cells leading to anemia. It can affect the immune system, increasing the chance for infection.
- Breathing low levels of benzene over a long period of time is also known to increase the chances for developing cancer, like leukemia and other blood cancers.

## How to Protect Yourself



- Avoid breathing in gasoline vapors when you're filling your car's gasoline tank.
  - Move away to an area to get fresh air.
- Limit the time you spend near idling car engines to help reduce exposure.
- Limit the use of products that contain benzene like paint, lacquer, varnish remover, gasoline, glues, furniture wax, thinners, or laundry detergent.
  - To avoid benzene-based chemicals in laundry detergent, use an eco-friendly laundry detergent with plant-based surfactants. Surfactants are chemicals that break up stains on the clothes to make it easier for the dirt to wash off in water.
- Store products with benzene outdoors and away from your indoor space.
- If you use products with benzene, work in a well-ventilated area and take breaks to get fresh air.
- If you store gasoline on your property, make sure it's in an airtight container away from your indoor living space.
- Do not smoke in enclosed spaces or near children.
- Use a High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) cleaner to improve air quality in your home. For more information, go to this website <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/list-carb-certified-air-cleaning-devices>

## What To Do If You're Exposed to Benzene

- If someone is unconscious, having seizures, or having trouble breathing, call 9-1-1 right away.
- Contact Poison Control as soon as possible at 1-800-222-1222 (they're available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week).
- Speak with your doctor to let them know your concerns. There is a test that can be used to measure recent exposure.
  - If you don't have a doctor, call the Department of Public Social Services at (866) 613-3777; or visit <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/Get-Medi-Cal/Pages/asset-limits.aspx>

### For more information, visit:

- [Benzene Overview by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry \(ATSDR\)](#)
- [Facts About Benzene by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.](#)