

For Health Professionals

Health Alerts

Health Advisory #52 - Ricin Detected In Postal Facility In South Carolina - 10/27/2003

This is an official CDC Health Advisory

The United States Postal Service, in conjunction with federal and state law enforcement and public health officials, identified an unmarked and sealed envelope containing a threatening note and a sealed container believed to contain a toxic substance at a small postal handling facility in Greenville, South Carolina. The Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed that the substance was the toxin Ricin.

The facility was closed and CDC conducted environmental testing. The results of the environmental testing were negative for the presence of Ricin. There are no indications of employee exposure or of adverse health effects as a result of this incident. A criminal investigation by the FBI and US Postal Inspection Service is currently underway.

Ricin is a potent biologic toxin that is derived from castor beans. Inhalation of Ricin or of abrin, which is a closely related toxin, typically leads to cough and respiratory distress followed by pulmonary edema, respiratory failure, and multisystem organ failure. Weakness and influenza-like symptoms of fever, myalgia, and arthralgia may also be reported.

For an overview of Ricin, including signs, symptoms, and treatment, please visit <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/ricin/index.asp>. Anyone needing more information on Ricin poisoning should contact a local poison control center.

Clinicians who suspect cases of Ricin poisoning are requested to immediately report such cases to their state or local health departments (716) 858-7697 or (716) 898-3696 after-hours.

CDC requests that reports of suspected cases from state and local health departments be reported to the CDC Emergency Operations Center, telephone 770-488-7100.