
Where is arsenic found?

In the environment, arsenic cannot be destroyed it can only change its form.

- Arsenic is found naturally at low levels in the water of many NWT rivers, lakes, and in the soil.
- Arsenic may be released into the environment through mining activities (i.e. smelting).
- Fish, berries, and some mushrooms are sources of arsenic. Arsenic in fish is mostly in a form that is harmless to humans.* Other food sources include rice, rice-based cereals, and seaweed.
- Arsenic may be found in wood preservatives however commercially arsenic-treated wood was phased out in 2004.
- Cigarette smoke.

What are the possible health concerns?

Short-term overexposure (a brief exposure to an extremely high level) to inorganic, toxic form of arsenic

- Vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhea.
- Numbness and tingling of hands and feet.
- Muscle cramping and death may also occur in extreme cases.

Long-term exposure (exposure over months, years)

- Can cause bladder, kidney, liver, lung and skin cancer.
- Other skin problems include skin lesions (wounds), changes in the color of the skin, and hard patches on the palms and soles of feet.
- May harm the nervous system and may affect learning in children.
- May contribute to cardiovascular disease and may affect lung function.

How to reduce your exposure to arsenic?

- NWT's Chief Public Health Officer has recommended to avoid harvesting berries, mushrooms or other plants in areas impacted by industrial activities, and to avoid fishing and recreational water activities in lakes with documented high arsenic levels as part of a precautionary public health advisory: [http:// www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/newsroom/arsenic-lake-water-around-yellowknife](http://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/newsroom/arsenic-lake-water-around-yellowknife)
- If you have an infant, breastfeed if you can. Feed a variety of cereals to your infant, not only rice-based.
- Do not burn older pressure-treated wood (manufactured before 2004) and avoid using it for home projects.
- Have children wash their hands after they play outside.
- Reduce dust and soil going inside the house (i.e. vacuum front entrance often).
- If you have outdoor playground equipment or deck, apply a sealant or coating every one to two years.

*If you ate seafood 2-3 days before your urine sample was collected, your result may show an elevated level of arsenic however the form of arsenic in seafood is not a health concern because it is in a less toxic form.

For more information: http://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/contaminants-fact-sheets-arsenic-compounds_1.pdf