Green Tobacco Sickness (GTS) in Tobacco Harvesters, Nicotine Poisoning

Green tobacco sickness (GTS) comes from the skin exposure to nicotine in wet tobacco leaves. The most commonly exposed areas of skin include the hands, forearms, thighs and back. This illness is more common during harvesting season (priming), but can happen anytime there is exposure to tobacco. Workers breaking off ripe leaves and carrying them under the arms helps cause this. The clothes may become soaked with tobacco juice quickly. The armpit absorbs chemicals more easily than other skin areas. Workers wearing wet clothing are more likely to get GTS. Younger workers are more commonly affected. The average time from starting work to getting sick is 10 hours, but this varies. The illness lasts a couple days.

SYMPTOMS

The most common problems are:

- Nausea.
- Increased sweating.
- Abdominal cramping.
- Dizziness.
- Vomiting.
- Salivating.
- Difficulty breathing.
- Abnormal temperature.
- Diarrhea.
- Weakness.
- Headaches.
- Rapid breathing.

TREATMENT

You should wash your skin well immediately with soap and water if you develop any of the problems listed above.

PREVENTION

- Wearing waterproof clothing and gloves will help prevent this illness.
- Learn about the dangers of harvesting wet tobacco. Change into clean, dry clothing and boots during the work day if your clothes become wet.
- Take extra precautions while working right after a rainfall.
- Learn about the importance of safe work practices to prevent GTS. Ask you employer how to help prevent this.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Any of the above problems are getting worse rather than better.
- You develop a seizure or become unconscious.

Most of this information is courtesy of the CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

Document Released: 08/15/2007 Document Re-Released: 06/15/2009
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