

CROWD-CONTROL WEAPONS: MEDICAL TIPS

CHEMICAL IRRITANTS

(KNOWN AS TEAR GAS AND PEPPER SPRAY)

Chemical Irritants include a variety of chemical compounds intended to produce **sensory irritation**. They are typically deployed in two ways: in the form of **spray** or as a **canister/grenade**.



TONY KARUMBA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

WHAT TO EXPECT AND MEDICAL TREATMENT

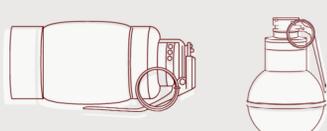
RESPIRATORY

Temporary choking sensation, temporary difficulty breathing

Get out of the area immediately and find cool, fresh air in a well-ventilated area. Try to start breathing calmly.

Seek medical attention for:

- » Prolonged symptoms, persistent fast breathing rate



EYES

Tearing, pain, redness, eyelid spasm, temporary blurry vision

- » Wash with copious amounts of water
- » Remove contact lenses immediately

Seek medical attention if:

- » Symptoms last longer than an hour, vision is blurry for a prolonged time, or there is a sensation of having a foreign body in the eye

SKIN

Burning sensation, pain, temporary redness

- » Wash with copious amounts of water and use soap, if possible, especially for pepper spray exposure or exposure to unknown chemical irritants
- » Apply antacid liquid (such as “Maalox”) for some symptomatic relief
- » Avoid using lotions, Vaseline, or oils
- » Remove all contaminated clothing

Seek medical attention for:

- » Blisters or burns, persistent itching, redness or burning, prolonged redness (more than one hour)

OTHER SYSTEMS

Fast heart rate, dizziness or weakness

Seek medical attention for:

- » Any prolonged symptoms, irregular heartbeat.

KEEP IN MIND

Tear gas canisters are often very hot, and can cause burns as well as trauma.

Pepper spray tends to cause pain immediately on contact and can last 15-90 minutes. Tear gases usually activate (by reacting with sweat or oils on the skin) once they have contact with the skin and their effects are of shorter duration (5-15 minutes).

The newer CS gases and pepper spray oils can last for days on clothing, backpacks, etc. Wash everything with soap and water before touching it again.

Health care workers can become exposed by treating patients—always tell your doctor or nurse what happened and if you’ve decontaminated yet.

Allergic reactions to tear gas, blistering, burns, and other severe reactions are not uncommon. Seek medical attention immediately.

Exposure to chemical irritants while under the influence of drugs or alcohol can worsen symptoms. Seek medical attention right away and attempt to remain calm.

Psychological impacts may occur, so make sure you seek the help you need.

People with respiratory or other chronic diseases, children, and the elderly are at higher risk for severe reactions.

Chronic exposure to these chemical irritants has UNKNOWN effects but they may be serious, including fetal abnormalities or miscarriage in pregnant women, chronic respiratory disease, allergic dermatitis, or possibly cancer. Avoid frequent exposure as much as possible.

WATER CANNONS



YOTAM RONEN/ACTIVE STILL

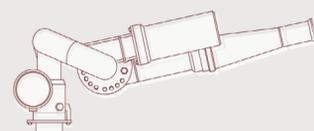
Water cannons shoot water at **very high pressure**. The water may be mixed with **dyes, chemical irritants, or malodorous agents**.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Water cannons may cause **bruising** or even **knock people over**

Although some initial pain and minor superficial injuries can be expected, the effects of **falling** on hard objects or other people and **direct injuries** from the water cannon can be significant

Exposure to water during cold weather increases the risk of **hypothermia** and **frostbite**



MEDICAL TREATMENT

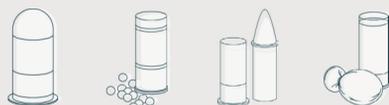
(see also KIP section)

For exposure to water in cold weather: exchange wet clothing immediately for warm, dry layers. Evacuate to a warm place. For potential frostbite, do not rewarm the skin until you can ensure that it will not be exposed to cold again. When evacuated to a safe area, gently warm the area in warm (not hot) water. Do not use direct heat from heating pads, radiators, or fires, and do not put any pressure on the injured areas.

KINETIC IMPACT PROJECTILES



ABBAS MOMANI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Kinetic impact projectiles include **rubber** and **plastic bullets, bean bag rounds**, and other projectiles. Some bullets may carry **chemical irritants**, have **metal cores** or components, or be fired in multiple rounds or groups.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Bruising and **injuries to the skin**

Blunt trauma from KIPs may also cause **internal injuries** such as **bone fractures**, internal bleeding, and **organ damage**

Some KIPs may penetrate the skin and cause **serious internal injuries** and possibly **death**

MEDICAL TREATMENT

For minor injuries, apply ice or cold compresses for 24-48 hours to affected areas, and take mild analgesic pain medications such as acetaminophen and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory analgesics.

Seek medical attention for:

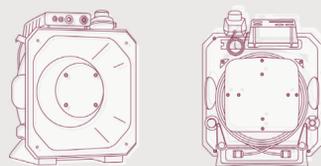
- » Any injuries to the face and other vulnerable or delicate body parts such as the genitalia, hands, or neck
- » Bleeding or penetrated skin related to a bullet wound
- » Any pain that feels different from a temporary bruise
- » Blood in urine, swelling, severe pain, difficulty moving, or cuts

ACOUSTIC DEVICES



© PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE, 2016. PHOTO BY MICHAEL HENNINGER

Acoustic devices, also known as sound cannons, **emit loud noises**. They typically are intended to cause **discomfort or pain**.



WHAT TO EXPECT

Although some initial pain, discomfort, or temporary **ringing in the ears** can be expected, prolonged ringing in the ears, **deafness**, or **pain** can occur

MEDICAL TREATMENT

If you are exposed or have ear pain, leave the area immediately and seek a quiet area.

Seek medical attention for:

- » Persistent ringing in the ears, deafness, or severe ear pain
- » Any bleeding from the ears, severe headache, or other unexpected symptoms

STUN GRENADES



ABBAS MOMANI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Stun grenades are also known as **flash-bangs** or **concussion grenades**, and are designed to cause disorientation and a sense of panic.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Stun grenades produce **loud noises** and **bright flashes**. At close range, they may result in projectile injuries and **serious burns**

Stun grenades may cause **burns, bruising, ear pain**, or **vision problems**, especially if they explode at close range

MEDICAL TREATMENT

Aloe vera gel or antibiotic ointment may help with minor burns. Ice or cool compresses can help with pain from burns.

Seek medical attention for:

- » Any injuries to the head/face and other sensitive body parts such as the genitalia, hands, or neck
- » Any burns, blisters, or deeper injuries
- » Any pain that feels different from a temporary bruise
- » Prolonged hearing or vision problems

*The above information is provided as a resource only, and is not to be used or relied on for any diagnostic or treatment purposes. This information is not intended to serve as patient education, does not create any patient-physician relationship, and should not be used as a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.

Note that the weapons listed above can cause radically different, often unexpected, reactions in different individuals.

For more information, see Physicians for Human Rights and INCLO, “*Lethal in Disguise: The Health Consequences of Crowd-Control Weapons*.” (March, 2016).

