

FACT SHEET: Hydrogen Fluoride

Safe Use and Handling



Anhydrous hydrogen fluoride (HF) is a highly corrosive, toxic, and volatile liquid or gas, usually supplied in steel cylinders. When dissolved in water, it forms hydrofluoric acid, a toxic corrosive solution. The acid dissolves silica and related materials; many applications in research labs rely on this property. In all its forms, HF is exceptionally hazardous and requires great attention to safety planning and practice.

NEED TO KNOW:

- CAS No.: 7664-39-3
- HF (aq, g) reacts with:
 - **Base** (sodium, potassium, ammonium hydroxides) violently.
 - **Metals** (steel) to produce flammable and explosive hydrogen gas. **NOTE:** Old gas cylinders of HF are especially dangerous since evolution of hydrogen gas will create excessive pressures.
- HF is **NOT** compatible with glass, ceramic, or metal containers. Keep in plastic containers.
- Store HF in a cool, well-ventilated area away from heat, sunlight, and combustibles.
- Email oehs@tulane.edu for more information and/or consultation.

MORE INFO:



EFFECTS OF EXPOSURE:

HF rapidly penetrates human tissue by all routes of exposure (skin contact, inhalation, ingestion). Fluoride binds to calcium ions resulting in severe toxic action which may initially be symptom-free, but could subsequently result in fatality. Toxic effects and symptoms may include:

- Severe deep burns, due to tissue death. Burns may not appear until hours after the exposure.
- Eye irritation at low exposure, progressing to burns, corneal opacity, and potential destruction of eye at higher exposures.
- Respiratory tract irritation that progresses to potentially fatal coughing, chest tightness, choking due to constriction of airway, internal burns, and pulmonary edema (fluid in lungs). Pulmonary edema can be fatal.
- Nerve malfunction, causing extreme pain.
- Acute systemic toxicity, including heart arrhythmia, cardiac arrest, collapse, and death. This may occur from any route of HF exposure.
- Possible irreversible injuries include scarring, finger loss, limb amputation, blindness, and bronchitis.

SAFE LABORATORY PRACTICES:

- **DO NOT** work with HF when alone or after regular business hours.
- Work with HF in a ducted chemical fume hood only. Ensure that an eyewash/showers station is in the immediate vicinity.
- Keep calcium gluconate salve readily available.
- Hydrofluoric acid attacks glass, ceramics, and many metals. Always store and use in polyethylene, polypropylene, or PTFE vessels.
- Always store, transport, and use HF inside secondary containment.
- Cylinders of anhydrous HF may generate dangerous internal pressures upon long storage that may lead to explosions. Check the pressure periodically and keep a written or electronic log (text file, spreadsheet, or OEHS database).
- Label all containers and areas where HF is used.
- Always segregate HF waste in clearly labeled, thick polyethylene waste containers inside secondary containment.
- Keep HF SDS readily available.
- Create a standard operating procedure (SOP) for handling HF and provide internal training to new users. OEHS (oehs@tulane.edu) can assist.

PPE AND ACCESSORIES:

- Wear appropriate PPE when working with HF and have essential accessories available:
 - Lab coat (minimum standard cotton)
 - Chemical resistant apron
 - Splash goggles with face shield. Do **NOT** wear contact lenses.
 - Chemical-resistant gloves. Inspect all gloves carefully for pinholes before use. All gloves must be carefully decontaminated before removal. Recommended combination for highest protection is to double glove with disposable neoprene gloves over reusable butyl gloves. Disposable nitrile gloves are not acceptable for HF usage.



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- **NEVER** work with HF alone or after hours.
- HF reacts with glass, which should **NEVER** be used to store or transfer it. Use chemically compatible containers, such as those made from polyethylene or Teflon.
- Ensure all containers of HF are clearly labeled.
- **ALWAYS** work with a chemically compatible secondary containment tray.
- Ensure HF containing vials and flasks are securely supported and not likely to tip over.
- Keep containers closed to minimize exposure and prevent etching of fume hood glass from HF vapors.



HF SPILL KIT:

Purchase or create a HF spill kit that contains the following:

- HF-compatible absorbent (1 kg) – see [HF SOP](#) for details
- HF-resistant gloves, e.g., laminate film (North Silver Shield ® / 4H ®, Ansell Barrier ®) or butyl
- Hazwaste labels
- Thick Ziplock bags
- Small dustpan and brush
- Paper towels
- Plastic screw-top container suitable for solid waste
- Printed SDSs for the specific HF/ HF-containing reagent present in lab

HF FIRST AID KIT:

Ensure that the HF first aid kit contains the following:

- Non-expired calcium gluconate gel
- HF-resistant gloves e.g., laminate film (North Silver Shield ® / 4H ®, Ansell Barrier ®) or butyl
- [Calgonate ® HF first aid instructions](#). Read and understand instructions for use of Calgonate. Incorporate the instructions into the lab's HF SOP and print out for lab use.
- [Honeywell ® HF medical treatment document](#) and the HF SDS must be printed and kept in the lab. Provide the documents to medical responders in the event of an HF exposure.

FIRST AID MEASURES:

In all instances, notify DPS at (504)-865-5911 (Uptown) or (504)-988-5555 (Downtown) of HF exposure and request medical assistance. Inform medical personnel about HF exposure and supply them with SDS and Honeywell® documents.

- **Skin Contact:** Immediately (within seconds) wash affected area for at least 5 minutes using copious amounts of water. Remove all contaminated clothing immediately.
 - After thorough washing, immediately massage calcium gluconate gel into affected area (using gloves).
 - Re-apply gel every 10 to 15 minutes until medical help arrives.
 - If calcium gluconate gel is not available, continue rinsing with water until medical help arrives.
- **Eye Contact:** Immediately rinse eyes for 30 minutes. Do NOT apply calcium gluconate gel to eyes.
- **Ingestion:** Dilute the acid by drinking copious amounts of milk (preferable) or water. **DO NOT** induce vomiting.
- **Inhalation:** Immediately move to fresh air.

HAZARDOUS MATERIAL SPILL:

- Notify staff and restrict access.
- Minor spills inside a chemical fume hood can be cleaned with an HF spill kit. Do not attempt to clean up HF spills unless familiar with HF and its properties/hazards. Refer to the [Spill Response and Clean-Up Flow Chart](#) for more information.
- For spills outside the chemical fume hood, place absorbent material or pads on or around the spill, if safe to do so, before evacuating. Notify Tulane Emergency DPS immediately at (504)-865-5911 (Uptown) or (504)-988-5555 (Downtown).
- For HF gas leaks, only attempt to stop gas flow if safe to do so. Otherwise, evacuate the area and notify Tulane Emergency DPS immediately at (504)-865-5911 (Uptown) or (504)-988-5555 (Downtown).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- CDC/NIOSH: [Hydrogen Fluoride/Hydrofluoric Acid: Systemic Agent](#)
- NIH/PubChem: [Hydrofluoric Acid](#)
- ASTDR: [Hydrogen Fluoride, Anhydrous](#)
- Harvard University: [Guidelines for the Safe Use of Hydrofluoric Acid](#)