Gloves for Handling Pesticides

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This NebGuide explains types of gloves, and how to choose and properly use gloves when mixing, loading, or applying a pesticide. It covers how to maintain gloves and how these procedures can help reduce exposure to chemicals and protect human health.

Properly protecting yourself when handling pesticides can decrease the risk a pesticide poses to your health and safety. Pesticide handling includes mixing, loading, or applying pesticides, all of which could expose your hands to chemicals. Using the right gloves is essential because the majority of pesticide exposure occurs through the skin. Chemical-resistant gloves are one of the most important pieces of personal protective equipment (PPE). Most pesticide labels list minimum requirements for personal protective clothing and equipment, such as gloves. A pesticide label may require you to wear waterproof gloves, at a minimum. However, you may choose to wear gloves that offer more protection than those recommended. Even if a label does not require chemical-resistant gloves, we recommend that you wear them when handling any pesticide.

**Waterproof gloves** keep out water; they allow no measurable movement of water or aqueous solutions through the material during use. They may not offer protection against chemicals such as organic solvents (alcohol, acetone, petroleum distillates, etc.) used in some pesticide formulations.

**Chemical-resistant gloves** act as a physical barrier to protect your hands from chemical substances. The type of material that will offer protection varies depending on the chemicals used. No material resists all chemicals equally well, so you may need different types of gloves for different pesticides. The concentration of the pesticide and length of contact will affect how long the material will remain resistant to the chemical. According to the Worker Protection Standard (WPS), chemical-resistant PPE must be made of material that allows no measurable movement of the pesticide being used through the material during use. Typically, chemical-resistant gloves are also waterproof.

**Glove Materials**

Following are materials often used or considered for use when handling pesticides. Prices are given for comparison, based on gloves with similar thickness (17 mils, 1 mil = 0.001 inch).

**Barrier laminate** gloves (Figure 1) are resistant to most pesticides and offer the greatest protection. They consist of two or more different materials that are laminated or blended together. They may be uncomfortable or clumsy to wear for some tasks. ($7—$11 per pair)

Figure 1. Example of EPA’s highest rated protective glove material, barrier laminate (Photo Credit: UNL).
**Butyl rubber** gloves (Figure 2) are made of a synthetic rubber, provide good protection under most conditions, and are durable. They also resist abrasion, and stay flexible at low temperatures. One downside to butyl is cost, as gloves are fairly expensive. ($30—$50 per pair)

**Polyethylene** gloves are most often used for light-duty tasks that require frequent glove changes, such as in the food service industry. They can become brittle when exposed to sunlight. Use in pesticide handling is limited to dry or water-based pesticides and gloves must be thick enough to avoid tearing or puncture. (*Less than $1 per pair, usually considered disposable.*)

**Polyvinyl chloride (PVC)** is another common material used in chemical-resistant gloves. Most PVC gloves stay flexible even in cold environments. PVC has fairly high puncture resistance and provides excellent grip. ($4 per pair.)

**Viton®** is a good choice for glove material because it is very flexible and comfortable to wear. It is more expensive than most other chemical-resistant gloves. ($150-$175 per pair.)

**Cotton** gloves are neither chemical-resistant nor waterproof. Avoid using cotton gloves, unless directed to do so by the label. Certain fumigants, such as pelletized aluminum phosphide, require cotton gloves because they can penetrate rubber, neoprene, and leather. If trapped inside a glove, these fumigants can cause severe skin irritation and burns, or be absorbed through the skin. Cotton gloves allow airflow so that fumigant gases won't be trapped against and burn the skin.

**Canvas and leather** gloves are neither chemical-resistant nor waterproof. They are not recommended because they can absorb pesticides and cannot be cleaned. Household cleaning gloves or gloves worn by medical personnel are inadequate for handling pesticides.

**Glove Thickness**

The thickness of the material can affect a glove’s lifespan and its susceptibility to tears, abrasions, and general wear. Manufacturers sell gloves with thickness ranges of 4–22 mils, and other thicknesses also may be available. Breakthrough time, the length of time it takes for the pesticide to permeate the glove, is generally longer the thicker the material. A material’s breakthrough time will be shorter when exposed to concentrated pesticides as opposed to diluted pesticides, but even so, the thicker material will offer protection longer. Cost often varies with thickness; thicker gloves usually are more expensive. Keep in mind, however, that thicker gloves offer better protection than thinner ones.

**Disposable vs. Reusable**

Gloves with less than 14-mil thickness often are referred to as disposable (Figure 3) and are used only once.
Thicker gloves, 14-mil or greater, are often referred to as reusable. They can be cleaned after each mixing/loading task or pesticide application and used again. Reusable gloves still have limited lifespans, however. The number of times you can reuse these gloves is determined by the hours of use or contact time, and the type and concentration of pesticide being handled. Gloves exposed to concentrated pesticides will wear out much faster than those exposed to diluted pesticides.

Glove Selection

The type of glove material that will provide protection depends upon the pesticide used, whether it is concentrated or diluted, and the length of contact time with the pesticide. The glove material and thickness are two factors to consider.

Any plastic or rubber material is resistant to dry pesticides and to water-based pesticides (those with water as the only diluent or solvent). Dry pesticides include dusts, granules, pellets, and some baits. Water-based pesticides include wettable powders, soluble powders, some solutions, dry flowables (water-dispersible granules), and microencapsulated pesticides.

The type of material that is resistant to nonwater-based liquid pesticides depends on the formulation of the product being handled. Liquid pesticides that are not water-based include emulsifiable concentrates, ultra-low-volume and low-volume concentrates, low-concentrate solutions, flowables, aerosols, dormant oils, and invert emulsions. Common organic solvents found in these pesticide formulations are xylene, fuel oil, petroleum distillates, and alcohol.

The EPA developed a chart that rates the chemical resistance of various materials used for gloves when exposed to different pesticide formulations, ranging from dry and water-based formulations to those with different types of organic solvents. EPA and product registrants use the chart to determine gloves to be used when handling a particular pesticide. This information is then given on the pesticide label.

Table II, a reproduction of EPA’s chart, gives the types of glove materials and their ratings to help determine the appropriate gloves to use when mixing and loading or applying a pesticide. The first column of Table II has the solvent categories (A through H). A pesticide formulation’s solvent category is based on the solvent(s) used in the formulation rather than the active ingredient(s). Examples of solvents in those categories are given in parenthesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glove Size</th>
<th>Circumference of palms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extra small</td>
<td>6–7 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>7–8 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>8–9 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>9–10 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra large</td>
<td>10–11 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2XL</td>
<td>11–12 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumbo</td>
<td>12–13 inches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Glove Size

Proper glove fit is essential. Poorly fitting gloves can leave you vulnerable to pesticide exposure. A glove that is too tight will be uncomfortable and may split open, allowing the pesticide to come in contact with your skin. Gloves that are too large can slide around on your hands and allow the pesticide to run down into the gloves and onto your skin. Operating equipment and other tasks also become more difficult when you can’t get a good grip, increasing the chance for mistakes. Always try on gloves and ensure they fit properly before handling pesticides.

Depending on the manufacturer and material, disposable and reusable gloves are available in standard or long-cuff lengths. Determine the best glove size for you by measuring the circumference around the widest part of the palm of your hand. For example, if it measures 8 inches, medium would probably be the best choice. Table I lists available glove sizes:
The high, moderate, slight, and none ratings tell the amount of chemical resistance each material has to a particular solvent category. A high chemical-resistance rating for a solvent category means that, with proper care and cleaning, the glove can be reused and still provide good protection. A rating of none means the material offers no chemical resistance and should not be used for a specific solvent category. The notes at the bottom of the chart tell how long you can safely wear gloves of a certain material and thickness while handling a pesticide in a specific solvent category. All ratings are based on gloves that are at least 14 mils thick, except for barrier laminate and polyethylene. EPA says that only gloves with a high level of chemical resistance should be listed on product labeling. This means that when selecting gloves, if you have options, select the type with the high protection rating for the product you will use.

A label may specifically list the glove material to use when handling the product (Figure 4), or may refer to the solvent category and allow the handler to choose (Figure 5).

**Liners**

You may wear lightweight, single-use cotton liners inside chemical-resistant gloves, provided the liners do not extend outside the chemical-resistant gloves. These liners can improve the comfort and ease of putting on and taking off your gloves. Never reuse these liners, in order to avoid potential exposure to pesticides that may have been absorbed by the cotton material. If directly contacted
by a pesticide, remove and discard the liners immediately. In addition, you should avoid gloves with integrated linings, linings that cannot be separated from the glove. The Worker Protection Standard (WPS) prohibits the use of chemical-resistant gloves with non-separable absorbent lining materials. These materials absorb pesticides, are difficult to clean, and increase your chance of pesticide exposure.

**Preparation and Use**

Glove manufacturers put the name of the glove material on the packaging, but sometimes not on the gloves themselves. To avoid confusion, write the glove material on the inside of the glove cuff with a permanent marker. Before handling the pesticide, read the pesticide label to make sure you will be using the correct type of glove.

Check gloves before each use for brittleness, wear, or leaks. A good practice is to fill the gloves with water and look for any holes or tears, or put on the gloves and put your hands in a bucket or sink of clean water. Dispose of any glove according to the pesticide label if it is defective or has significant wear and replace with a new one. In most cases, we recommend wearing sleeves over the tops of your gloves to keep pesticide from running down the sleeves and into the gloves (*Figure 6, left*). When working with your hands above your head, roll glove tops into cuffs over your sleeves or wear gloves over your sleeves (*Figure 6, right*) to prevent the pesticide from running down the gloves onto your forearms. As an extra safety measure, you can apply duct tape where the glove and sleeve meet. The most important thing is to wear gloves! If you are mixing and loading a concentrated pesticide and it gets on your gloves, you should rinse them immediately before continuing the activity.

![Figure 6. Wear sleeves over the tops of your gloves when working with pesticides, in most cases (left). When working with pesticides above your head, wear gloves over your sleeves (right) (Photo Credit: UNL).](image)

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**Remove Disposable Gloves Safely**

1. Wash gloves prior to removal. Pinch outside of glove near wrist.
2. Peel glove down away from wrist, turning glove inside out.
3. Pull glove off and hold in gloved hand.
4. Slide two fingers under the wrist of the remaining glove, without touching the outside of the glove.
5. Pull and roll second glove down over the first glove. Dispose of according to pesticide label directions.
6. Wash hands with soap and water.

![Figure 7. Adapted from publication by The Ohio State University, PSEP & OSU Ag Safety and Health.](image)
Cleaning and Removal

All gloves must be carefully removed after use to prevent contaminating your skin or other areas, such as the interior of tractor cabs. Never place contaminated gloves directly onto the seat of your vehicle or other surfaces with which you may come in contact. After finishing the job, thoroughly wash and remove gloves (Figures 7 and 8). By following these guidelines, you can prolong the life of your gloves as well as protect yourself from exposure.

After removing disposable or reusable gloves, always wash your hands with warm water and soap before going about daily activities. This will ensure that you do not transfer pesticide residue from your hands into your home, vehicle, or other areas where it could expose you, your family, or other nontargets to pesticides.

Storage and Disposal

Proper maintenance of chemical-resistant gloves includes not only cleaning and removal, but also safe storage and disposal practices.

1. After using disposable gloves, discard them according to label directions.

2. Store unused disposables in their original bag or a container with a lid. Store cleaned reusable gloves in a bucket or plastic bag once they are dry (Figure 9).

3. Mark the container with its contents (e.g., ‘new disposable gloves’ or ‘used gloves’).

4. Store gloves in a different location from pesticides to protect them from accidental contamination during
storage. Gloves should be stored in a clean environment, away from direct sunlight or temperature extremes. Do not store used gloves in your home where they might be accessible to children or pets.

**Summary**

Using the type of gloves required by the pesticide label, and properly maintaining and storing gloves when not in use will reduce your risk of pesticide exposure. If waterproof gloves or no gloves are required by the label, consider upgrading to chemical-resistant gloves to improve protection. Although disposable gloves (thickness of less than 14 mils) cost less and reduce cleaning and storage considerations over reusables (greater than or equal to 14 mils), thicker gloves increase protection from exposure.