

Factsheet: What you need to know about injecting silicone

Immune Response to Silicone Injections

Existing infections or exposure to toxins or allergens can react with liquid silicone. You may experience a reaction where the needle was used if you have herpes, sinus infections, bacterial infections, dental problems such as numerous cavities, or exposure to allergens such as mold. Reactions are often minor, but they can also be life-threatening. If you experience severe itching, pain, or bleeding, seek medical attention.

Bacterial Infections

Cases of bacterial infections with what are called mycobacterium abscessus infections following cosmetic procedures are on the rise. The bacteria that causes this kind of infection is common from Texas to Florida. The infections grow rapidly, are difficult to treat, but do heal in most cases whether treated or not. The infections may take six to eight months to heal, even with treatment.

Silicone Pulmonary Embolism

Pulmonary embolism means a blockage of blood flow in the lungs. One of the risks of using liquid silicone is that very often (if not always) at least some of the silicone enters the bloodstream and is carried to other locations, where it can harden and block the flow of blood, or slow the blood flow and cause clotting. This is especially true when large amounts of silicone are injected.

If you experience any of these symptoms, you may be experiencing pulmonary embolism:

Shortness of breath, especially if it occurs suddenly even when at rest.

Chest pain that may feel like you are having a heart attack. It may become worse when breathing deeply, coughing, eating, bending, or stooping. The pain may not go away when at rest.

Coughing, especially if the cough produces blood-streaked spit.

Other symptoms can include wheezing, swelling in one or both legs, clammy or bluish skin, excessive sweating, rapid or irregular heartbeat, weak pulse, lightheadedness, and fainting.

The symptoms may start or increase at the time of injection or within a few days, or they may start years after injection. If you are struck or receive a blow to or near an area that has received silicone injections, silicone may be loosened and increase your risk of pulmonary embolism or other complications.

Pneumonitis

Pneumonitis simply means inflammation of lung tissue—pneumonia is a type of pneumonitis. Silicone and other injected toxins can migrate to the lungs and cause pneumonitis. Difficulty breathing and coughing are the most common symptoms. If left untreated, pneumonitis can develop into shortness of



After receiving injections, this transwoman had to have surgery to remove infected skin and breast tissue. [Source: Fox, et al. 2004. Figure 1.]

First, reduce your risks!

Pumping silicone to enhance one's body is illegal and dangerous. Still, for a variety of reasons, people continue to seek out liquid silicone injections from non-medical providers. If you feel you have to pump, **recognize the dangers, limit your risks, and if you suspect a problem—stop the procedure and seek medical attention!**

And remember, small amounts over several sessions are safer than large injections, especially if it is your first time to receive injections.

Also note that if someone tells you they are using medical grade silicone, there are two kinds of medical grade silicone. One is intended for lubrication of needles and surgical equipment, but is not intended for injection. Only medical-grade liquid injectible silicone (LIS) is intended for cosmetic purposes.

breath, coughing, fatigue, loss of appetite, and weight loss. Over time, lung tissue will become stiff, like a dried sponge. At this stage, it is called pulmonary fibrosis, and can cause heart or respiratory failure.

Kidney effects

Silicone can also migrate to the kidneys, causing

kidney failure. Few studies have been done on this, but the Centers for Disease Control investigated three deaths in 2007 due to kidney failure

“We still have lumps and bumps where injections took place,” [Zakiua Teagle of Tampa, Florida] said recently. “They do move around. They get sore and it feels like someone’s pinching or poking you with a knife, just jabbing you” (Black-Market Silicone, 2009).

following cosmetic injections of what is suspected to have been liquid silicone (MMWR, 2008).

Moving to other parts of the body

Silicone can move to other parts of the body besides the lungs and kidneys. One study in 1975, before use of liquid silicone was banned, noted an autopsy that found

silicone in every organ along with large amounts in the lungs. Injections in the face can move in unpredictable ways, so they may not stay where you want them. Injections in the hips, buttocks, or breasts can even move down into the legs over time.

Gravity usually moves silicone



Arlene Lafferty, who had silicone injections in her face. The silicone moved over time and hardened, disfiguring her. [Source: Silicone Injection Deaths, 2012.]

downward, but the bloodstream can move silicone throughout the body. A 2008 report documents two transwomen who were hospitalized after receiving silicone injections in the hip and butt areas. One recovered enough to be released, and one died. Autopsy revealed that the silicone had migrated into the brain tissue (Clark, et al., 2008).

Adding to the risks

Other factors can increase the chance that silicone injections can cause problems. If you smoke, are overweight, or take estrogen, your blood may have an increased tendency to clot; silicone can increase clotting even more.

Reversing damage

When liquid silicone is injected under the skin, some will bind to the muscle and tissues at the injection site—you actually want that so it stays in place, and small amounts tend to bind better. But some silicone will be absorbed into the bloodstream and carried to other organs; and some may simply slide under the skin to other locations, where it can bind to muscle and tissue near or far from where it was injected. Because it is free liquid, the silicone can be absorbed into the tissue, making removal extremely difficult, and in some cases impossible. There is generally no way to remove silicone after it has been injected except by removing the tissue where it has settled.



Photo of a woman who had silicone injected into her breasts beginning at age 23. By 29, she was diagnosed with tumors and had to have numerous surgeries to scrape out silicone and, eventually, to remove her breasts and nipples. [Source: Silicone Injections, 2012.]

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