



## All About Lye

Lye is caustic. It burns, even in tiny flakes. Lye in your eyes or on skin or clothing can cause severe burns. You should definitely never swallow or inhale. If you do accidentally, make sure you call 911 and/or [Poison Control](https://www.poisoncontrol.gov/) at [1-800-222-1222](https://www.poisoncontrol.gov/) immediately!

Keep children and animals away from lye. Store this properly where children cannot access this.

The fumes in lye, when mixed with water, can burn your throat and chest. Work in a well-ventilated space. Do not breathe in the fumes. I personally prefer to mix my lye and water outdoors to make sure that there is plenty of air flow.

Keep newspaper handy to clean up any spills immediately. Also, have distilled white vinegar nearby, as it neutralizes the caustic effects of lye.

Do not keep lye or any lye solutions in metal. Lye reacts with any kind of metal. It is best to mix and store lye in plastic, glass, stoneware or unchipped enamel containers.

Be careful when using glass containers. Water and lye can heat enough to break the glass.

Measuring spoons of stainless steel are okay, but cups should be glass or heat-resistant plastic. Utensils exposed to lye should be enamel, crockery, glass or wood. Never use these utensils for anything else ever! Rinsing them or soaking them in vinegar makes them safe to handle and store, but you never want to use them for food or other kitchen use.



Never add hot or even warm water to lye crystals. They heat up when combined with water, and the hot water will cause spattering, increasing your risk of it burning your skin, mouth, eyes or other body parts.

For protection when making soap, wear rubber gloves and keep a bowl of vinegar nearby. If you accidentally get lye on your skin, you can dip them immediately into the vinegar to neutralize it.

### **First Aid for Lye Burns**

As we all know, accidents happen. If you or anyone in your household should ever (God forbid) come into direct contact with lye, here are the first aid instructions.

#### **Skin Burn**

Flush immediately with water. If not flushed, the lye will continue to burn. Add a little salt to the water that you are using to flush the burn. No access to water? Use whatever you have. Even soda pop poured over the burn is better than allowing the lye to continue to burn the skin. If, after 5-10 minutes the skin is still red and painful, seek burn care in the local hospital emergency room.

#### **Swallowed**

Call 911 immediately. Swallowing lye can be fatal. Lye will burn the esophagus, so inducing vomiting should be avoided to prevent the lye from further burning the throat. Drinking milk or eating ice cream may help



neutralize the lye's chemical reaction. Although vinegar, orange juice and so forth will neutralize the lye, they should not be ingested because the combination creates heat. The rise in temperature will burn physically in addition to the chemical burn.

#### **In the Eye(s)**

Call 911 immediately. Flush the eye(s) immediately with water. Add salt to the water. Use milk if available to neutralize the chemical reaction. This will almost invariably cause a trip to the emergency room as there can be permanent damage to your eyesight. Do not use vinegar or boric acid.