

Novichok nerve agent

The use of Russian-developed nerve agent Novichok to poison ex-spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter makes it “highly likely” that Russia was involved, British Prime Minister Theresa May has said

■ **Origin:** Created in Soviet Union in 1970s and 1980s in attempt to avoid chemical weapons treaty that had just been signed – any new substances would not be on banned list

■ **Toxicity:** Believed to be five to 10 times more lethal than VX and sarin nerve agents, and harder to identify

■ **Variants:** Exists in liquid or solid form, including ultra-fine powder. Can be stored or carried as two less toxic ingredients, which become lethal when mixed

■ **Effect:** Occurs within as little as 30 seconds to two minutes if agent is inhaled or touches skin. Fine powder can take 18 hours to act

■ **Exposure:** Victim's clothing should be removed and their skin washed with soap and water. Antidotes such as oximes can be effective if administered quickly. **Some Novichok variants specifically designed to resist standard antidotes**



SYMPTOMS: Messages between nerves and muscles are blocked – causing bodily functions to collapse

Brain: Reduced oxygen in body can lead to coma and brain damage

Eyes: Pupils constricted

Skin: Profuse sweating

Lungs: Breathing inhibited, extreme fluid secretion

Heart: Abnormal blood pressure and heart rate

Digestive system
Nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea

Typically, muscle spasms and seizures occur, leading to death by asphyxiation or cardiac arrest

