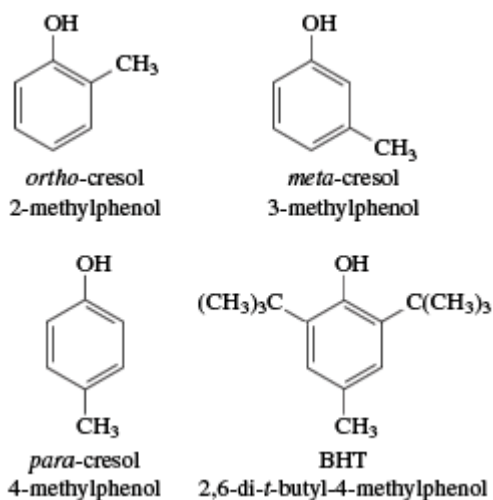


Cresol

Cresol (C_7H_8O), any of the three methylphenols with the same molecular formula but having different structures: *ortho*- (*o*-) cresol, *meta*- (*m*-) cresol, and *para*- (*p*-) cresol.



The cresols are obtained from coal tar or petroleum, usually as a mixture of the three stereoisomers (molecules with the same number and type of atoms but with unique atom arrangements). This mixture is also called tricresol, or cresylic acid. All three isomers are very toxic, and in high concentrations they can be absorbed in fatal amounts through the skin. The cresols are strong germicides, and in low concentrations they are effective disinfectants and antiseptics. They are also used in low concentrations in sheep-dips (disinfectants often containing insecticides and pesticides). The cresols are important components of creosote, a wood preservative produced as a by-product of coal tar distillation. Cresols give creosote its antibacterial and insecticidal properties, as well as its toxicity and its ability to irritate bare skin.

As phenol derivatives, cresols can be used in phenol-formaldehyde resins. *m*-Cresol is also used in making photographic developer and explosives. *p*-Cresol can be converted to butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT), an important antioxidant in foods.

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Citation Information

Article Title: Cresol

Website Name: Encyclopaedia Britannica

Publisher: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.

Date Published: 26 September 2013

URL: <https://www.britannica.com/science/cresol>

Access Date: June 28, 2020

