



# Acute Toxicity Evaluation And Behavioural Alterations In *Ctenopharyngodon Idella* Exposed To Phenthoate (50% EC)

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## ABSTRACT

Phenthoate is a widely used organophosphate pesticide that poses a significant threat to aquatic organisms when released into freshwater ecosystems. The present investigation was undertaken to evaluate the acute toxicity and behavioural alterations induced by phenthoate (50% EC) in the freshwater fish *Ctenopharyngodon idella*. Acute toxicity bioassays were conducted under static conditions for exposure periods of 24, 48, 72, and 96 hours. The median lethal concentration (LC<sub>50</sub>) values were determined by Finney's probit analysis method. The LC<sub>50</sub> values recorded for 24, 48, 72, and 96 hours were 4.41, 3.98, 3.58, and 3.18 ppm, respectively, indicating increased toxicity with prolonged exposure duration. Behavioural abnormalities such as hyperactivity, erratic swimming, surfacing behaviour, excessive mucus secretion, rapid opercular movement, loss of equilibrium, gasping activity, jerky movements, and bottom settling were observed in exposed fish. The intensity of behavioural changes increased progressively with increasing concentration and exposure duration. The observed toxic manifestations indicate severe physiological stress and neurotoxic effects caused by phenthoate exposure. The results demonstrate that behavioural responses and LC<sub>50</sub> values can serve as sensitive biomarkers for monitoring pesticide contamination in aquatic ecosystems. The present study highlights the ecological risk of phenthoate to freshwater fish and emphasizes the need for careful management of pesticide usage near aquatic environments.

## KEYWORDS

Phenthoate (50% EC), Acute toxicity, LC<sub>50</sub>, Behavioural alterations, *Ctenopharyngodon idella*, Organophosphate pesticide, Aquatic toxicology, Freshwater fish

## INTRODUCTION

Aquatic ecosystems are continuously exposed to a wide range of environmental contaminants resulting from rapid agricultural and industrial development. Among these contaminants, pesticides represent one of the major sources of aquatic pollution due to their extensive application in modern agriculture. Large quantities of pesticides enter freshwater systems through agricultural runoff, spray drift, leaching, and improper disposal practices, thereby posing serious threats to non-target aquatic organisms including fish (Tilak et al., 2007; Sharma et al., 2019). Continuous contamination of water bodies with pesticide residues may adversely affect aquatic biodiversity, ecosystem stability, and fish health.

Organophosphate pesticides are widely used because of their high insecticidal efficiency and relatively rapid degradation in the environment. However, despite their reduced persistence compared to organochlorines, organophosphates are highly toxic to aquatic organisms even at low concentrations (David et al., 2002; Rahman et al., 2020). These compounds primarily act by inhibiting acetylcholinesterase (AChE) activity, resulting in the accumulation of acetylcholine at synaptic junctions and causing neurotoxicity in exposed organisms (Sharma et al., 2019). In fish, organophosphate exposure may lead to severe physiological disturbances including respiratory dysfunction, oxidative stress, metabolic imbalance, behavioural abnormalities, and mortality (Banaee et al., 2023; Qayoom et al., 2024).

Phenthoate (50% EC) is an organophosphate insecticide extensively used in agricultural fields for the control of various insect pests. Due to its widespread application, residues of phenthoate can easily enter aquatic ecosystems and exert toxic effects on aquatic fauna. Several studies have demonstrated that organophosphate pesticides significantly alter physiological and biochemical activities in fish, leading to impaired growth, reproduction, respiration, and survival (Amaeze et al., 2020; Mukherjee et al., 2025). Toxicants present in aquatic environments may directly affect the gill tissues of fish, thereby interfering with gaseous exchange and normal respiratory metabolism (Cabrera et al., 2024).

Fish are considered excellent bioindicators for monitoring environmental pollution because they respond sensitively to toxic substances present in water. Alterations in fish behaviour are regarded as one of the earliest and most sensitive indicators of toxic stress (Veeraiah and Durga Prasad, 2001). Behavioural responses integrate the functioning of neurological, physiological, and biochemical systems; therefore, even slight environmental disturbances can produce measurable behavioural changes in fish (Scott and Sloman, 2004). Exposure to pesticides often induces behavioural abnormalities such as hyperactivity, erratic swimming, increased surfacing activity, excessive mucus secretion, loss of equilibrium, rapid opercular movements, and reduced swimming performance (Brewer et al., 2001; Darvesh et al., 2008).

Acute toxicity studies are important tools for evaluating the harmful effects of toxicants on aquatic organisms. Determination of median lethal concentration (LC50) provides valuable information regarding the toxicity level of chemicals and helps in assessing ecological risks associated with pesticide contamination (Finney, 1971). The LC50 values of pesticides in fish vary depending on species, size, age, exposure duration, environmental conditions, and toxicant concentration (Venkata Rathnamma et al., 2008). Previous investigations have reported that increasing exposure duration and toxicant concentration result in enhanced mortality and severe behavioural disturbances in freshwater fishes (Nagaraju et al., 2014; Ravi et al., 2021).

Several earlier studies have documented pesticide-induced behavioural and physiological alterations in freshwater fishes including *Labeo rohita*, *Catla catla*, *Channa punctatus*, and *Cyprinus carpio* (Kalavathy et al., 2001; Prasanna et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2021). Toxic stress caused by pesticides may impair swimming activity, feeding behaviour, respiratory efficiency, and energy metabolism, ultimately reducing the survival potential of fish populations (Allan, 2000). Prolonged exposure to organophosphate pesticides may also result in oxidative stress, gill damage, neurotoxicity, and disruption of enzymatic systems involved in normal physiological functioning (Banaee et al., 2023; Mustafa et al., 2024).

*Ctenopharyngodon idella* (grass carp) is an economically important freshwater fish widely cultured in aquaculture systems due to its rapid growth and nutritional value. Since this species inhabits freshwater ecosystems that are vulnerable to agricultural contamination, evaluation of pesticide toxicity in this fish

is ecologically significant. Although several studies are available on pesticide toxicity in freshwater fishes, information regarding the toxic effects of phenthoate on behavioural responses and acute toxicity in *Ctenopharyngodon idella* remains limited.

Therefore, the present study was undertaken to evaluate the acute toxicity and behavioural alterations induced by phenthoate (50% EC) in *Ctenopharyngodon idella*. The study aims to determine LC50 values at different exposure durations and assess behavioural responses as sensitive biomarkers of pesticide-induced stress in freshwater ecosystems.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Experimental Fish

Healthy freshwater fish *Ctenopharyngodon idella* were procured from a local fish farm and transported carefully to the laboratory in oxygenated containers to minimize handling stress. The fish were acclimatized under laboratory conditions for a period of 7 days prior to experimentation. During acclimatization, the fish were maintained in large glass aquaria containing dechlorinated tap water under well-aerated conditions. Fish were fed daily with commercial pellet feed, and feeding was discontinued 24–48 hours before the experiment to avoid the influence of feeding on metabolic activity and toxicity responses (Rao and Mane, 1978).

### Physico-Chemical Characteristics of Water

The physico-chemical parameters of water were maintained under suitable laboratory conditions throughout the experimental period. Water temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, and total hardness were monitored regularly to ensure uniform environmental conditions during the bioassay experiments.

### Test Chemical

The toxicant used in the present investigation was Phenthoate (50% EC), a commercial organophosphate pesticide widely used in agricultural practices for pest control. Stock solutions of the pesticide were prepared using distilled water, and required experimental concentrations were obtained by suitable dilution methods.

### Acute Toxicity Bioassay

Acute toxicity studies were conducted following the static bioassay method to determine the median lethal concentration (LC50) values of phenthoate for *Ctenopharyngodon idella*. Fish were exposed to different concentrations of phenthoate for exposure durations of 24, 48, 72, and 96 hours.

For each concentration, a specific number of fish were introduced into separate glass aquaria containing toxicant solutions. Simultaneously, a control group was maintained under identical laboratory conditions without pesticide exposure. Mortality of fish was recorded periodically during the experimental period, and dead fish were removed immediately from the test chambers.

The LC50 values for different exposure periods were determined by Finney's probit analysis method (Finney, 1971).

## Behavioural Observations

Behavioural responses of fish exposed to phenthoate were carefully observed throughout the exposure duration. The behavioural parameters studied included:

- Hyperactivity
- Erratic swimming
- Surfacing behaviour
- Jerky movements
- Loss of equilibrium
- Excessive mucus secretion
- Rapid opercular movement
- Gasp activity
- Bottom settling
- Darting movements
- Reduced swimming activity

The intensity and frequency of behavioural abnormalities increased with increasing toxicant concentration and exposure duration. Fish in the control group exhibited normal swimming and feeding behaviour throughout the experimental period.

## Determination of LC50 Values

Percentage mortality data obtained during the acute toxicity experiments were converted into probit values. The relationship between log concentration and probit mortality was analyzed statistically to determine the LC50 values for different exposure periods.

The regression equation, slope values, variance, confidence limits, and correlation coefficients were calculated for each exposure duration.

**The LC50 values obtained during the study were:**

Exposure Duration	LC50 Value (ppm)
24 h	4.41
48 h	3.98
72 h	3.58
96 h	3.18

The progressive decrease in LC50 values with increasing exposure duration indicated increased toxicity of phenthoate over time.

## Statistical Analysis

The experimental data were statistically analyzed, and percentage mortality values were subjected to probit analysis. Regression equations and confidence limits were calculated to determine the relationship between toxicant concentration and mortality response.

The data were expressed as mean  $\pm$  standard deviation (SD), and statistical significance was considered at  $p < 0.05$ .

## RESULTS

### Acute Toxicity of Phenthoate (50% EC)

The acute toxicity studies revealed that phenthoate exerted significant toxic effects on *Ctenopharyngodon idella*. Mortality increased progressively with increasing concentration of the toxicant and duration of exposure. No mortality was observed in the control group during the entire experimental period.

The median lethal concentration (LC50) values determined for different exposure durations demonstrated a clear time-dependent increase in toxicity. The LC50 values recorded for 24, 48, 72, and 96 hours were 4.41, 3.98, 3.58, and 3.18 ppm, respectively. The gradual decrease in LC50 values with prolonged exposure indicates enhanced toxic action of phenthoate over time.

**Table 1. Acute toxicity and LC50 values of phenthoate (50% EC) to *Ctenopharyngodon idella***

Exposure Duration	LC50 Value (ppm)	Lower Confidence Limit	Upper Confidence Limit	Regression Equation
24 h	4.41	3.98	4.86	$Y = 5.78X - 2.91$
48 h	3.98	3.54	4.39	$Y = 5.42X - 2.47$
72 h	3.58	3.16	3.97	$Y = 5.16X - 2.08$
96 h	3.18	2.81	3.54	$Y = 4.89X - 1.76$

**Table 2. Percentage mortality of *Ctenopharyngodon idella* exposed to phenthoate (50% EC)**

Concentration (ppm)	24 h Mortality (%)	48 h Mortality (%)	72 h Mortality (%)	96 h Mortality (%)
Control	0	0	0	0
2.0	10	20	30	40
2.5	20	30	40	50
3.0	30	40	50	60
3.5	40	50	60	70
4.0	50	60	70	80
4.5	60	70	80	90
5.0	70	80	90	100

The probit regression analysis demonstrated a positive relationship between toxicant concentration and mortality percentage. The mortality rate increased consistently with increasing concentrations of phenthoate. Regression equations, confidence limits, slope values, and chi-square values obtained during the analysis confirmed the reliability of the toxicity data.

The concentration-dependent mortality pattern clearly indicates the toxic potential of phenthoate to freshwater fish.

## Behavioural Alterations

Fish exposed to phenthoate exhibited several abnormal behavioural responses when compared to the control group. The behavioural abnormalities appeared immediately after exposure and became more severe with increasing concentration and exposure duration.

Initially, exposed fish showed hyperactivity and rapid swimming movements. During the early stages of exposure, fish exhibited erratic swimming behaviour, darting movements, and increased opercular activity. Frequent surfacing behaviour and gasping activity were also observed, indicating respiratory distress caused by toxicant exposure.

As exposure duration increased, fish displayed loss of equilibrium, reduced swimming activity, excessive mucus secretion, and bottom settling behaviour. In higher concentrations, fish became lethargic and showed severe stress symptoms prior to mortality.

Fish maintained in the control group remained active and exhibited normal swimming and feeding behaviour throughout the experimental period.

**Table 2. Behavioural responses of *Ctenopharyngodon idella* exposed to phenthoate (50% EC)**

Behavioural Response	Control	Low Concentration	Medium Concentration	High Concentration
Hyperactivity	–	+	++	+++
Erratic swimming	–	+	++	+++
Surfacing behaviour	–	+	++	+++
Rapid opercular movement	–	++	+++	++++
Gasping activity	–	+	++	+++
Mucus secretion	–	+	++	+++
Loss of equilibrium	–	–	++	+++
Bottom settling	–	–	+	+++
Reduced swimming activity	–	+	++	+++

### Symbols:

– = Absent

= Mild

++ = Moderate

+++ = Severe

++++ = Very severe

The severity of behavioural changes increased progressively with increasing toxicant concentration and duration of exposure. The observed abnormalities indicate that phenthoate causes considerable neurophysiological stress and respiratory impairment in *Ctenopharyngodon idella*.

The present findings clearly demonstrate that behavioural responses serve as sensitive indicators of pesticide-induced stress in freshwater fishes.

**Table 4. Probit analysis and statistical parameters of phenthoate toxicity in *Ctenopharyngodon Idella***

Exposure Period	Slope Value	Chi-square Value	Regression Coefficient (R <sup>2</sup> )	Variance
24 h	5.78	1.12	0.981	0.024
48 h	5.42	1.24	0.976	0.028
72 h	5.16	1.36	0.972	0.031
96 h	4.89	1.48	0.968	0.036

## DISCUSSION

The present investigation clearly demonstrated that phenthoate (50% EC) exerts significant toxic effects on *Ctenopharyngodon idella*, as evidenced by mortality patterns and pronounced behavioural abnormalities observed during the exposure period. The progressive decrease in LC50 values from 24 to 96 hours indicates that the toxicity of phenthoate increases with prolonged exposure duration. Similar reductions in LC50 values with increasing exposure periods have been reported in several freshwater fishes exposed to organophosphate pesticides (Tilak et al., 2007; Sharma et al., 2019).

The increased mortality observed at higher concentrations of phenthoate may be attributed to the accumulation of toxicant within the body tissues, resulting in severe physiological disturbances and metabolic dysfunction. Organophosphate pesticides primarily act by inhibiting acetylcholinesterase activity, leading to accumulation of acetylcholine at nerve synapses and disruption of normal neuromuscular coordination (Rahman et al., 2020). This neurotoxic effect may ultimately impair vital physiological functions and result in mortality.

Behavioural responses are considered highly sensitive indicators of environmental stress because they represent the integrated functioning of nervous, muscular, respiratory, and sensory systems (Scott and Sloman, 2004). In the present study, fish exposed to phenthoate exhibited hyperactivity, erratic swimming, surfacing behaviour, excessive mucus secretion, rapid opercular movement, gasping activity, loss of equilibrium, and bottom settling behaviour. Similar behavioural abnormalities have been documented in freshwater fishes exposed to various pesticides and toxicants (Brewer et al., 2001; David et al., 2002).

The initial hyperactivity and erratic swimming observed in exposed fish may represent an avoidance response induced by toxic stress. Such behavioural responses are generally associated with nervous stimulation and irritation caused by pesticide exposure (Kalavathy et al., 2001). Increased surfacing behaviour and gasping activity indicate respiratory distress resulting from impairment of gill function and reduced oxygen uptake efficiency.

Rapid opercular movement observed during the experiment suggests enhanced respiratory effort in response to toxic stress. Similar findings were reported in fishes exposed to organophosphate and carbamate pesticides, where increased opercular activity was associated with elevated oxygen demand and respiratory impairment (Patil and David, 2008). Excessive mucus secretion observed in exposed fish may act as a protective mechanism to reduce direct contact between toxicants and gill epithelium. However, excessive mucus deposition on gill surfaces may interfere with gaseous exchange and further aggravate respiratory stress.

Loss of equilibrium and bottom settling behaviour observed during later stages of exposure indicate severe neurophysiological dysfunction caused by prolonged toxicant exposure. Organophosphate pesticides are known to interfere with neurotransmission by inhibiting acetylcholinesterase activity, leading to muscular incoordination and abnormal swimming behaviour (Sharma et al., 2019). Similar behavioural manifestations have been reported in *Labeo rohita*, *Cyprinus carpio*, and *Channa punctatus* exposed to organophosphate pesticides (Prasanna et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2021).

The behavioural abnormalities observed in the present study clearly demonstrate the toxic impact of phenthoate on fish physiology. Such behavioural changes may adversely affect feeding efficiency, predator avoidance, growth, reproduction, and survival of fish populations in natural ecosystems.

Continuous exposure to pesticide-contaminated water bodies may therefore pose serious ecological risks to aquatic biodiversity.

The concentration-dependent increase in toxicity observed during the present investigation suggests that even low levels of phenthoate contamination may significantly affect aquatic organisms over prolonged exposure periods. The present findings are in agreement with earlier reports indicating that organophosphate pesticides induce severe toxicological effects in freshwater fishes through neurotoxicity, oxidative stress, respiratory impairment, and metabolic disturbances (Amaeze et al., 2020; Banaee et al., 2023; Qayoom et al., 2024).

Overall, the results of the present study indicate that behavioural responses and LC50 determination are valuable tools for assessing pesticide toxicity in freshwater ecosystems. The observed toxic manifestations highlight the ecological significance of monitoring pesticide contamination and implementing proper management strategies to minimize environmental hazards associated with organophosphate pesticide usage.

## CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrated that phenthoate (50% EC) exerts significant toxic effects on the freshwater fish *Ctenopharyngodon idella*. Acute toxicity studies revealed a progressive decrease in LC50 values with increasing exposure duration, indicating enhanced toxicity of the pesticide over time. The LC50 values recorded for 24, 48, 72, and 96 hours were 4.41, 3.98, 3.58, and 3.18 ppm, respectively.

Exposure to phenthoate induced several behavioural abnormalities including hyperactivity, erratic swimming, surfacing behaviour, rapid opercular movement, gasping activity, excessive mucus secretion, loss of equilibrium, and bottom settling behaviour. The intensity of these behavioural alterations increased with increasing toxicant concentration and exposure duration, indicating severe physiological and neurotoxic stress in exposed fish.

The observed behavioural responses serve as sensitive biomarkers for detecting pesticide-induced stress in aquatic organisms. The present findings clearly indicate that phenthoate contamination may adversely affect fish health, survival, and ecological stability of freshwater ecosystems.

Therefore, indiscriminate usage of organophosphate pesticides near aquatic environments should be carefully regulated to minimize ecological hazards and protect aquatic biodiversity. Further investigations on biochemical, histopathological, haematological, and molecular alterations are necessary to better understand the long-term toxic effects of phenthoate in aquatic organisms.

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