

Yushchenko poisoned by 'Agent Orange'



Mr Yushchenko: a higher dose could have killed him

By Bojan Pancevski in Vienna

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A near-lethal dose of dioxin, possibly slipped into a bowl of soup, was the cause of the mysterious illness suffered by Viktor Yushchenko, Ukraine's opposition leader, doctors said yesterday.

Austrian doctors who have been treating the presidential candidate said blood and tissue tests revealed concentrations of the chemical 1,000 times above normal levels.

Dr Michael Zimpfer, the head of Vienna's Rudolfinerhaus clinic, said further tests would establish whether Mr Yushchenko, who first fell ill in September, had also been poisoned by another toxin.

"Dioxin is easily absorbed by the body and might have been used as a carrier to facilitate the passage of other substances into the body," said Dr Zimpfer.

"If, for example, arsenic had been used, it would have taken effect quicker had dioxin been used as a carrier."

His patient's condition was now satisfactory. "But if this dose had been higher, it may have caused death."

