

Toxin leaves Russian spy critically ill

LONDON (Reuters) — Former Russian spy Sergei Skripal was one of two people reported critically ill on Monday after exposure to an unidentified substance in Britain, two sources close to the investigation said.

British police said two people, a 66-year-old man and a 33-year-old woman, had been found unconscious on a bench in a shopping center on Sunday in the southern English city of Salisbury after exposure to the unknown substance; a

witness said the man was twitching and staring upwards.

British police did not release the names of those who were being treated but two sources close to the investigation told *Reuters* that the critically ill man was Skripal.

Both are critically ill in intensive care. Police declared a major incident.

Skripal, once a colonel in Russia's GRU military intelligence, was convicted in Russia of betraying agents to British intelligence.

He was later swapped and granted refuge in Britain as part of a Cold War

style spy exchange in Vienna in 2010.

It was unclear what substance caused Skripal to fall ill.

"This has not been declared as a counter-terrorism incident and we would urge people not to speculate," Wiltshire police's Temporary Assistant Chief Constable Craig Holden told reporters.

"The pair, who we believe are known to each other, did not have any visible injuries."

"On the bench there was a couple, an older guy and a younger girl. She was sort of leant-in on him, it

looked like she'd passed out maybe. He was doing some strange hand movements, looking up to the sky," witness Freya Church told the BBC.

"They looked so out of it that I thought even if I did step in, I wasn't sure how I could help, so I just left them. But it looked like they'd been taking something quite strong."

A hospital in Salisbury said earlier on Monday it was "dealing with a major incident involving a small number of casualties."

It said staff and patients should come to the hospital as usual.

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