

Asbestos in Your Environment: What You Can Do to Limit Exposure

Asbestos may be present in your environment because it can be released from natural deposits or asbestos-containing products. Breathing asbestos could harm you. Avoiding asbestos and keeping dust down are the best ways to keep from breathing asbestos.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a general name given to a group of six different minerals made up of fibers and occurring naturally in the environment. Asbestos minerals do not dissolve in water or evaporate. They resist heat and fire and cannot be broken down easily by chemicals or bacteria.

Where is asbestos in the environment?

- Asbestos is made up of tiny fibers, too small to be seen with the naked eye. Disturbing natural asbestos deposits or asbestos-containing consumer products can spread the asbestos throughout soils in an area and release the tiny asbestos fibers into the air.
- Asbestos forms naturally in certain types of rock and is more often found near fault zones. If rocks containing asbestos are at the ground surface, you might be able to see veins of asbestos in them. Asbestos might also be present in waste piles from old asbestos mining operations or in other products such as talc or vermiculite.



A geologist can tell if the rocks in an area are more likely to contain asbestos.

A laboratory can test samples of rock, soil, or other materials to see if they have asbestos in them.

- In the past, companies mined asbestos minerals to use in making many types of consumer products. Although most products no longer contain asbestos, it's still used in a few products in the United States and in some other countries. Asbestos is present in old asbestos-containing consumer products. As these old products break down due to age or improper disposal, asbestos fibers can be spread throughout the environment.



How can I be exposed to asbestos?



You might breathe in asbestos fibers if asbestos-containing products or rocks are disturbed in some way. In areas that have natural asbestos or low-level asbestos contamination of soil, you could be exposed by

- Digging or shoveling dirt or using a leaf blower
- Running, hiking, bicycling, or riding off-road vehicles on unpaved surface

You can also breathe in asbestos indoors if old asbestos materials are present or if someone has tracked asbestos into the house from outside.

What should I do if I suspect asbestos might be present in my home or environment?

- **Be concerned.** Breathing asbestos can cause cancer and other diseases. Current science indicates that breathing any type of asbestos at any level can increase the risk of disease.
- **Don't panic.** In most cases, asbestos-related diseases develop after many years of regular exposure to relatively high levels of asbestos. Years (sometimes decades) may pass before disease develops, if it ever does.
- **Take action.** Reducing possible asbestos exposure now will minimize your risk of developing any asbestos disease in the future.



How can I reduce asbestos exposure outside?

Cover up possible sources.



Wet the ground before gardening or playing.



Drive slowly on unpaved roads.



Support ordinances and regulations to reduce the level of construction dust.

Keep dust down.

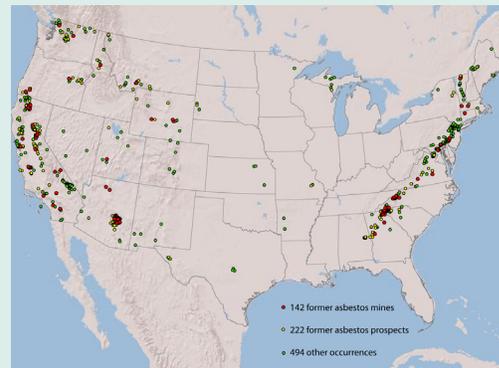


Use asbestos-free soil or landscape materials to cover gardens and yards that might have asbestos-containing rock or soil.



Pave walkways, driveways, or roadways that might have asbestos-containing rock or soil.

Plan your outdoor activities.



Learn if natural asbestos might be found in your area or areas you visit. The US Geological Survey has a national map of reported natural asbestos occurrences (<http://mrddata.usgs.gov/asbestos/>), and some states and counties have more-detailed maps of areas more likely to contain asbestos.



If asbestos might be present, stay on paved trails or areas with ground covering over the native soil.



Avoid old building sites or places with visible waste.

How can I reduce asbestos exposure inside?

Minimize possible sources.



Avoid touching or disturbing any possible asbestos-containing materials in your home. Pictures clockwise show examples of old pipe insulation, textured ceilings, damaged floor tiles, and vermiculite attic insulation.



Talk to your local or state environmental agency or an asbestos contractor about having asbestos-containing materials safely removed.

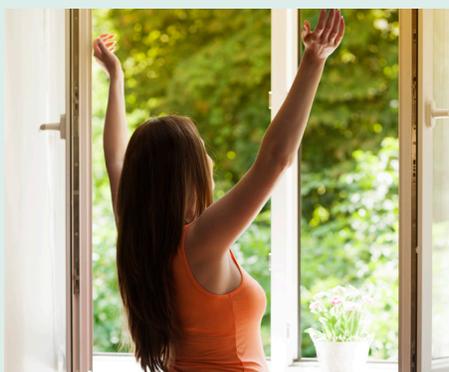
Prevent dirt and dust from entering your home.



Use doormats and remove shoes before entering.



Wipe your pets with a damp cloth.



Keep windows and doors closed on windy days and during nearby construction.

Clean properly.



Use a wet rag to dust, instead of a dry rag or duster.



Use a wet mop on non-carpeted floors.



Vacuum often using a vacuum with a high efficiency HEPA filter.



Use washable area rugs on your floors, and wash them regularly.