

Asbestos Information for Community Members

Introduction

- What is asbestos?
- What are past and present uses of asbestos?
- Why is asbestos a health concern?
- What are some asbestos-associated diseases?
- What should you do if you have been exposed to asbestos?

What is asbestos?

- Naturally occurring mineral
- Made up of long, thin fibers
- Fibers are heat resistant, strong, flexible and very stable
- Used widely in industry from the early 1900s to the 1970s



What is asbestos? Continued

- Loose or crumbling asbestos can release fibers into air
- Can breathe in tiny asbestos fibers without knowing it
- Some fibers breathed in can become lodged in lungs and may cause lung disease
- Symptoms of asbestos-related diseases may appear many years after exposure
- Not everyone exposed to asbestos develops health problems

Past Exposure in the Workplace

- Used in many industries in the United States before the 1970s
- Used in pipe and insulation coverings, boilers, industrial furnaces, and brake pads
- Workers who made asbestos-containing products at greatest risk of exposure during this time
- Workers carried asbestos dust home on skin and clothes

Past Exposure in the Workplace. Continued

- Asbestos still in some materials today
- Mined natural vermiculite mineral was contaminated with tremolite asbestos.
- Contaminated natural vermiculite was sold in attic insulation and potting soil
- People who handled contaminated vermiculite in manufacturing plants throughout country were exposed

Current Exposure in the Workplace

- During repair, renovation, removal, and maintenance of old asbestos-containing products such as automobile, buildings, homes
- Occupations that involve contact with old asbestos materials:
 - Carpenters
 - Construction worker
 - Utility workers
 - Electricians
 - Pipe fitters, Plumbers
 - Steel mill workers
 - Boilers makers, Shipyard workers
 - Mechanics working with brake and transmission products

Current Exposure in the Workplace. Continued

- Workers may disturb asbestos in old, phased-out products, such as insulation or pipe coverings
- Only disturbed, broken asbestos-containing materials release asbestos fibers
- Follow the appropriate safety procedures when handling asbestos in the workplace

Exposure at Home

- **Exposure:**
 - Occurs in attics with asbestos-containing insulation, pipes and boilers with asbestos covers, during home repairs.
- **What to do:**
 - Proper handling of asbestos is very important
 - Seek professional assistance
 - Contact your local health department for a listing of trained and certified asbestos contractors

Naturally occurring asbestos

- Asbestos is mainly found in underground rocks
- Asbestos fibers can be released if rocks are disturbed by human activities:
 - Mining (no longer occurs in the United States)
 - Construction (if rocks with naturally occurring asbestos is close to the surface)

Risk of Illness

- Risk depends three factors:
 1. number of fibers breathed in,
 2. how long you were exposed,
 3. number of times you were exposed
- Risk continues after exposure has stopped
- Symptoms usually begin 15–40 years after first exposure
- Not everyone who is exposed to asbestos will get sick

Asbestos-Associated Diseases – Parenchymal Asbestosis

Disease	Description	Typical Symptoms
Parenchymal asbestosis	A chronic lung disease caused by the scarring or thickening of lung tissue	Breathlessness that gets increasingly worse Sometimes: Cough and chest tightness or pain

Asbestos-Associated Diseases – Asbestos-Related Plural Abnormalities

Disease	Description	Typical Symptoms
Asbestos-related plural abnormalities	Occurs when asbestos fibers reach the lining of the lungs, called the pleura.	Presence of asbestos fibers can cause various reactions in the lung linings, many which are pretty mild.

Asbestos-Associated Diseases – Lung Cancer

Disease	Description	Typical Symptoms
Lung cancer	The same type of cancer caused by smoking and other factors	None (until late stage) Sometimes: Cough, wheezing, and difficulty breathing

Asbestos-Associated Diseases - Mesothelioma

Disease	Description	Typical Symptoms
Mesothelioma	A type of cancer that affects the lining of the lungs or the lining of the abdomen	None (until late stage) Sometimes: Cough, chest pain, and difficulty breathing

What To Do If You Have Been Exposed To Asbestos

- Stop exposure
- Contact your doctor about receiving:
 - Chest X-ray
 - Pulmonary function tests
 - Annual flu shots and a pneumococcal vaccine
- Quit smoking

Summary

- Asbestos is a mineral that was widely used in industry until the 1970s
- When disturbed, asbestos fibers are released into the air and you can breathe them in
- Asbestos can cause parenchymal asbestosis, asbestos-related pleural abnormalities, lung cancer, and mesothelioma
- If you are being exposed to asbestos, stop exposure immediately and contact your doctor

For More Information on Asbestos

- Contact CDC-INFO

- 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)

- TTY 888-232-6348 (24 hours/day)

- E-mail: cdcinfo@cdc.gov

- Web addresses:

- <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/asbestos/index.html>

- <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/contactus.html>