

Asbestos Fact Sheet

November 2020

What is Asbestos?

Asbestos is a mineral which naturally occurs in rock, soil and sediment. The fibres generally are heat resistant, very light, not visible to the human eye and have insulating properties.

What goods and materials is Asbestos found in and when?

Asbestos products have been used in the industrial and commercial settings since the 1800s. It was commonly used in housing built before the 1980s. Asbestos was used due to its fibres strength, heat resistance and insulating properties. It was largely used for insulation, soundproofing and fibreproofing and was found in over 3,000 products.

In Australia, Asbestos was totally banned on manufacture, use, re-use, import, transport and storage on the 31st of December 2003. Asbestos-containing products have been replaced with Asbestos-free products for use in roofing, interior and exterior wall cladding, eaves, fencing, water or flue pipes etc.

Why is Asbestos considered a health risk?

Asbestos becomes a health risk when the fibres become airborne and are breathed in. The risk increases with the number of fibres inhaled.

Even though Asbestos mining and importation has been banned in Australia, Asbestos materials are still found in products that were manufactured before 2003. Friable Asbestos and Non-friable Asbestos materials are still found in fibro, pipes, flue, drains, roofs, gutters, brakes, gaskets and clutches products manufactured before this ban.

Asbestos can become a health risk if Asbestos materials are unknowingly disturbed and the fibres are released into the air. The disease develops over decades and exposure can cause Asbestosis, Lung cancer, Pleural disorders and Malignant Mesothelioma.

What key industries does Asbestos affect?

The key industries that Asbestos is known to affect are:

- Construction and Demolition
- Telecommunications
- Utilities such as Water and Electricity
- Plumbing
- Mechanical Services.

References:

1. The Department of Health <https://bit.ly/2UeBE8h>
2. Safe Work Australia <https://bit.ly/36ppoHz>
3. Better Health Channel <https://bit.ly/2Uh5p8k>
4. Asbestos Safety & Eradication Agency <https://bit.ly/35knl8x>

What does Asbestos Health Monitoring involve?

Health monitoring of Asbestos includes:

- Completion of a questionnaire outlining exposure in current and previous roles, use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other workplace controls
- Completion of a standardised respiratory questionnaire
- Medical examination of the lungs and any other relevant areas
- Lung function testing – usually high-quality spirometry or complex lung function testing
- X-ray of the lungs reviewed by a qualified B reader according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) guidelines
- Review of each case by an Occupational Doctor with experience in managing respiratory screening programs who will provide counselling where needed

When should Asbestos Health Monitoring occur?

Health monitoring of Asbestos should occur at:

- Pre-employment (baseline medical assessment undertaken before the commencement of employment)
- Periodically (a periodic medical assessment conducted regularly during exposure, exact frequency to be determined by risk and jurisdiction requirements)
- Post-employment (a final medical assessment undertaken when exiting employment)

How does Injurnet's tailored Health Monitoring Service work?

In Australia, there are multiple jurisdictions with different legislation, guidelines, requirements and reporting to be considered in managing health monitoring for Asbestos. No matter where you are in Australia, Injurnet offers an end to end health monitoring medical service to assist your organisation to manage both the potential health effects for your workers and compliance requirements for every jurisdiction.

We are available to assist in all or any of the following:

1. Design of the program using a risk-based approach with your occupational health and safety representatives
2. Education of all stakeholders. This may include providing information or giving toolbox talks to workers to explain the process and allay any concerns
3. Coordination of testing at either clinics convenient to the workplace or at the workplace itself (not available for radiology)
4. Review of all information by an experienced occupational doctor
5. Following up of any abnormal results, arranging additional tests and providing advice and counselling to each worker about their results
6. Provision of a summary report on each worker to the employer and employee
7. Reporting about the program and its outcomes.

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