

Asbestos is the name given to a group of fibrous minerals that occur naturally in the environment. The fibers are resistant to heat, fire and chemicals, and do not conduct electricity. Asbestos has been used widely in commercial products, such as insulation, fireproofing materials and textiles, automotive brakes, and other construction materials. Occupational exposure to asbestos in the air is the main cause of asbestos poisoning and related lung and abdominal health problems including mesothelioma.

HOW DOES ASBESTOS GET INTO MY BODY?

Inhaling tiny asbestos fibers is the most common exposure type. It can also be consumed by drinking asbestos-contaminated water or, particularly for children, by eating asbestos-contaminated soil and dust.



WHAT CAN ASBESTOS DO TO ME?

Not all people who have contact with asbestos will develop a related health problem. Exposure to asbestos may cause lung cancer, asbestosis (a chronic lung disease characterized by lung tissue scarring and shortness of breath), as well as other related pleural diseases (diseases of the membrane surrounding the lung and chest). Mesothelioma, a rare form of cancer that forms around the lung or abdomen, is nearly universally caused by asbestos exposure. Symptoms of mesothelioma include shortness of breath, coughing, pain in the back and chest, nausea, and weight loss. Mesothelioma can develop 20 to 60 years after asbestos exposure.

WHAT ARE THE ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS FOR ASBESTOS?

The Occupational Safety and Health Agency limits asbestos in workplace air to 0.1 fibers per cubic centimeter during an eight-hour day and 40-hour week. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) limits asbestos in public drinking water to seven million fibers per liter. Additionally, EPA banned new uses of asbestos in 1989, though uses established before this date are still allowed. EPA also works to ensure that asbestos is controlled in [school buildings](#)¹ to prevent exposure.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection [Bureau of Air Quality](#)² enforces federal asbestos regulations and state regulations that protect potentially exposed workers.

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Have your home inspected for asbestos, especially before renting or buying an older home and before beginning renovation projects.
- Do not smoke or work to quit smoking. Smoking can increase susceptibility to asbestos-related diseases.
- Wear dust masks, gloves and protective clothing when working with asbestos or asbestos-containing products.
- If you work in an occupation that may expose you to asbestos, be aware that you may carry it home. Shower and change clothes before going home.
- Concerned about asbestos in your body? Visit a health care provider for testing and follow-up.

If you have any questions, contact us at env.health.concern@pa.gov.

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¹ <https://www.epa.gov/asbestos/asbestos-and-school-buildings>

² <https://www.dep.pa.gov/Business/Air/BAQ/BusinessTopics/Pages/Asbestos.aspx>