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Learn About Asbestos

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What is Asbestos?

Asbestos is a mineral fiber that occurs in rock and soil.

[Learn about vermiculite and asbestos-contaminated vermiculite insulation.](#)

Where Can I Find Asbestos?

Because of its fiber strength and heat resistance asbestos has been used in a variety of building construction materials for insulation and as a fire retardant. Asbestos has also been used in a wide range of manufactured goods, mostly in building materials (roofing shingles, ceiling and floor tiles, paper products, and asbestos cement products), friction products (automobile clutch, brake, and transmission parts), heat-resistant fabrics, packaging, gaskets, and coatings.

[Most uses of asbestos are not banned. A few are banned under existing regulations.](#)



Asbestos pipe wrap (joint partially removed)

Where asbestos may be found:

- Attic and wall insulation produced containing [vermiculite](#)
- Vinyl floor tiles and the backing on vinyl sheet flooring and adhesives
- Roofing and siding shingles
- Textured paint and patching compounds used on walls and ceilings
- Walls and floors around wood-burning stoves protected with asbestos paper, millboard, or cement sheets
- Hot water and steam pipes coated with asbestos material or covered with an asbestos blanket or tape
- Oil and coal furnaces and door gaskets with asbestos insulation
- Heat-resistant fabrics
- Automobile clutches and brakes

Read more about other places where asbestos can be found:

- [Schools](#)
- [Workplace](#)
- [Drinking water](#)
- [Air: regulations](#)

How Can People Be Exposed to Asbestos?

Asbestos fibers may be released into the air by the disturbance of asbestos-containing material during product use, demolition work, building or home maintenance, repair, and remodeling. In general, exposure may occur only when the asbestos-containing material is disturbed or damaged in some way to release particles and fibers into the air.

Health Effects From Exposure to Asbestos

Exposure to asbestos increases your risk of developing lung disease. That risk is made worse by smoking. In general, the greater the exposure to asbestos, the greater the chance of developing harmful health effects.

Disease symptoms may take many years to develop following exposure.

Asbestos-related conditions can be difficult to identify. Healthcare providers usually identify the possibility of asbestos exposure and related health conditions like lung disease by taking a thorough medical history. This includes looking at the person's medical, work, cultural and environmental history.

After a doctor suspects an asbestos-related health condition, he or she can use a number of tools to help make the actual diagnosis. Some of these tools are physical examination, chest x-ray and pulmonary function tests. Your doctor may also refer you to a specialist who treats diseases caused by asbestos.

Three of the major health effects associated with asbestos exposure are:

- lung cancer
- mesothelioma, a rare form of cancer that is found in the thin lining of the lung, chest and the abdomen and heart
- asbestosis, a serious progressive, long-term, non-cancer disease of the lungs

For more information on these and other health effects of asbestos exposure see the [Agency for Toxic](#)

Substances and Disease Registry, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and the National Cancer Institute.

Learn what to do to protect your family

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