

TOP 25 QUESTIONS

You May Have About Asbestos and Mesothelioma



HELP FOR
MESOTHELIOMA

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What exactly is asbestos?

Many people are surprised to learn that asbestos is actually a naturally occurring fibrous material. Given its innate ability to resist heat, fire and electricity, it was often used in construction materials, auto parts and a wide variety of other products. There are six types of asbestos:

- 1. Chrysotile** — Often referred to as “white asbestos,” this is by far the most common form of asbestos, which is why it is responsible for the most asbestos-related health problems. It can still be found in many homes and businesses.
- 2. Crocidolite** — Also called “blue asbestos,” this is by far the most deadly form of asbestos given its characteristics.
- 3. Amosite** — At one time, this “brown asbestos” was the second most common and often used as insulation. It is no longer mined.
- 4. Anthophyllite** — Given that this form of asbestos is rare, it was used in a limited number of consumer products.
- 5. Tremolite** — This form of asbestos was not used for commercial purposes.
- 6. Actinolite** — This was another rare form of asbestos that was not used in consumer products.

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Why is asbestos dangerous?

Asbestos fibers are microscopic, meaning they can easily become airborne when disturbed. If you inhale them, these tiny asbestos fibers can become lodged in your lung tissue and other surrounding areas of the body. Over time, asbestos fibers trapped in the body can cause several deadly diseases.

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What are the most common diseases associated with asbestos exposure?

While there are many medical conditions associated with asbestos, the most common include:

- **Mesothelioma** — This is a form of cancer in which abnormal and malignant cells form in the mesothelium, the thin membrane that covers and protects the internal organs in the chest and abdomen. There are several types of mesothelioma, including pleural mesothelioma, peritoneal mesothelioma and pericardial mesothelioma.
- **Lung Cancer** — This form of cancer is commonly linked to other factors in addition to asbestos exposure, including smoking and radon exposure.
- **Asbestosis** — This is a condition in which the victim's lung tissue becomes scarred over time.

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Is asbestos still common in the United States?

Many people are surprised to learn that the United States still hasn't completely banned the use of asbestos. In fact, not only do we still import a significant amount of asbestos every year, but it can still be found in certain products, including some replacement brake parts. Even worse, if your home was built before 1980, you may still be able to find asbestos in various spots throughout your home, including in the insulation, ceiling tiles, flooring tiles, siding and roofing materials, just to name a few places.

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How much asbestos exposure is needed to cause mesothelioma and other medical problems?

Simply put, there is no specific amount of asbestos exposure needed to cause mesothelioma and other asbestos-related medical issues. Every person reacts differently. In some cases, a person may work around asbestos for years and never have any problems, while others may develop mesothelioma even though they were exposed to asbestos for only a couple months. Since any amount of asbestos exposure can possibly cause mesothelioma, it is best to avoid exposure altogether.

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Will victims of asbestos exposure get sick right away?

Asbestos-related medical conditions will not occur overnight. Indeed, most asbestos victims will not begin to show symptoms of asbestos-related disease until years — or even decades — after exposure.

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How long does it take for mesothelioma victims to develop symptoms?

Unfortunately, there is no way to exactly measure how long it will take for an asbestos victim to develop mesothelioma, if ever. In most cases, however, it usually takes 20 to 50 years for mesothelioma symptoms to develop following exposure. Unfortunately, many victims may be quite old by the time symptoms arise, meaning they may have other pre-existing health conditions, which is another reason why mesothelioma can be so deadly.

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What are some of the symptoms of mesothelioma?

Diagnosing mesothelioma can be difficult because symptoms don't typically appear until the cancer is already quite advanced. Also, once symptoms do finally appear, they may vary from person to person. That being said, common symptoms of this deadly cancer include:

- Shortness of breath and difficulty breathing in general
- Fatigue and persistent tiredness, even after only minimal exertion
- Chest pain
- Severe coughing, including coughing up blood
- Fevers and night sweats
- Rapid weight loss
- Abdominal bloating

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How do doctors diagnose mesothelioma?

If you or a loved one is experiencing mesothelioma symptoms, it is important to speak with a doctor right away. If possible, choose a doctor who has experience dealing with mesothelioma. While every diagnosis is different, typical mesothelioma diagnostic procedures include:

- Shortness of breath and difficulty breathing in general

- Imaging tests such as X-rays, CT scans, PET scans and MRIs
- Blood tests, which look for certain biomarkers that are present in mesothelioma victims
- Biopsies, which are examinations of tissue or fluid from the body that look for the existence of cancer cells

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Is it possible for a doctor to misdiagnose mesothelioma?

Unfortunately, many symptoms associated with mesothelioma are similar to symptoms of other illnesses such as the flu, the common cold or even pneumonia. Given these similarities — not to mention that many doctors have never encountered mesothelioma — misdiagnoses occur quite often. This is why it is so important to always seek a second opinion from a doctor who has experience with mesothelioma.

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Is there a cure for mesothelioma?

While researchers and doctors are constantly looking for more effective medical treatments to combat mesothelioma, currently there is no cure that is 100 percent effective. To make matters worse, not only is mesothelioma a very aggressive form of cancer, but it is often not diagnosed until it has already reached advanced stages — meaning the prognosis for many mesothelioma victims is not good. However, there are treatments that can prolong life and help victims maintain a good quality of life. If you or a family member has been inflicted with this terrible disease, you should review all treatment options available and determine which one is best for you.

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Does smoking increase the chances of developing asbestos-related medical conditions?

While smoking cigarettes does not directly lead to mesothelioma, many studies have concluded that smokers who are exposed to asbestos are several times more likely to develop asbestos-related lung cancer. This means that those exposed to asbestos in the past should never take up smoking — or stop if they have already started.

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What age groups are most likely to develop mesothelioma?

Since it can take decades following asbestos exposure for individuals to show signs of mesothelioma, it is probably no surprise that most victims are older. In fact, according to

one report published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 80 percent of mesothelioma deaths involve victims over the age of 65.

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What jobs were the most likely to expose workers to asbestos?

Given its fireproofing, heat resistance and insulating capabilities, asbestos was once commonly used in many products, including brakes, gaskets and building materials such as insulation, shingles, flooring, ceiling tiles and plumbing products. Because of this, many workers encountered asbestos on a daily basis, particularly workers in the construction and shipbuilding industries. If you have ever worked as one of these, you may be at risk of developing mesothelioma:

- Construction worker
- Shipbuilder
- Shipyard worker
- U.S. Navy personnel
- Coast Guard personnel
- Auto mechanic
- Painter
- Pipefitter
- Electrician
- Boilermaker
- Steamfitter
- Plumber
- Welder
- Iron worker

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Why was shipbuilding so dangerous?

Prior to the 1980s, asbestos was commonly used in the construction of ships, including commercial ships, Coast Guard vessels and U.S. Navy vessels. It was an incredibly versatile and durable material, which is why it was found in hundreds of products and materials regularly used in the construction of these ships. For instance, asbestos could be found in boiler insulation, pipe insulation, pumps, gaskets and valves, just to name a few places. This is why anyone involved in the construction of these vessels is at risk of developing mesothelioma, along with those who served on these ships, including U.S. Navy and Coast Guard personnel.

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Was asbestos exposure common in the Navy and Coast Guard?

At one time, asbestos could be found throughout U.S. naval and Coast Guard vessels — from the boiler room to the deck. Sadly, as a result, countless vets were exposed to dangerous amounts of asbestos while serving their country. Now, years later, these same vets are suffering from asbestos-related medical conditions, including mesothelioma and lung cancer.

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Are construction workers still at risk for asbestos exposure?

Even today, construction workers are routinely exposed to asbestos, particularly if they do renovation and remodeling work. This is because many homes built prior to the 1980s still contain dangerous amounts of asbestos, meaning hazardous asbestos fibers can quickly become airborne once construction workers begin demolition and renovation work. If proper precautions are not taken in such situations, construction workers can inhale significant amounts of asbestos.

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Are family members of asbestos victims at risk?

In recent years, there have been many more instances of mesothelioma among family members of those who worked around asbestos. The most likely explanation for this increase is secondary exposure, which often occurs when workers in certain industries such as construction and shipbuilding inadvertently bring asbestos fibers home from work in their hair and clothes. Inevitably, family members of these workers — including spouses and children — are unknowingly exposed to significant amounts of asbestos and may eventually develop mesothelioma and other asbestos-related medical conditions years later. So asbestos puts not only the lives of workers at risk, but the lives of their family members as well.

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Can asbestos still be found in homes today?

If your house was built before 1980, there is a good chance you may still be able to find asbestos in your home. For example, asbestos may be present in attic and wall insulation, flooring tiles, insulating tape, ceiling tiles, siding, and patching compounds, just to name a few places. If these products are ever disturbed, you run the risk of releasing dangerous asbestos fibers into the air.

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Is it easy to identify asbestos?

Unfortunately, unless the material you are looking at has a label that clearly says it contains asbestos, there is no guaranteed way to figure out by sight if the material is asbestos. In most cases, some form of lab testing will be needed to determine the existence of asbestos. While many people use do-it-yourself asbestos test kits to collect suspected asbestos samples and send them to a lab for review, it is much safer to have your home inspected by a trained and accredited asbestos professional. After all, if you collect the sample improperly and needlessly disturb the asbestos fibers, you may make

matters worse than if you had simply left the material alone.

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What should you do if you suspect there is asbestos in your home?

If you believe you may have found asbestos in your home, the most important thing to do is to not disturb it in any way. So long as it isn't damaged or disturbed, it is less likely to pose an immediate health risk since the asbestos fibers are not airborne. In many cases, the best option is to simply cover up the asbestos and leave it undisturbed. You should consult with an experienced and accredited asbestos removal professional to determine the best course of action. DO NOT attempt to remove the asbestos yourself as you may put you and your family at risk.

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What legal options are available for asbestos and mesothelioma victims?

If you think you were exposed to asbestos and are now suffering from mesothelioma, lung cancer or another asbestos-related medical condition, you may be able to file a legal claim for compensation for your damages, including past and future medical expenses, lost wages and pain and suffering. Your claim may be against the party responsible for your exposure or possibly against one of the asbestos bankruptcy trusts set up to handle asbestos/mesothelioma claims. Also, if you were exposed to asbestos while serving in the military, you may be entitled to veterans disability compensation benefits.

Laws differ from state to state, however, meaning your legal options may be different depending on your circumstances. This is why speaking to an attorney is so important.

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Do family members have legal rights if they lose a loved one to mesothelioma?

Losing a loved one to mesothelioma can be overwhelming. However, family members need to remember that they may have legal options, including a possible wrongful death claim. While the rules surrounding wrongful death claims vary from state to state, they usually allow close family members such as spouses, parents, children and other dependents to file a claim for damages arising out of the premature death of a loved one. Depending on your jurisdiction, there may be other legal options, which is why it is so important to contact and experienced attorney right away to learn about your options.

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Is there a time limit for filing a mesothelioma lawsuit?

If asbestos victims develop asbestos-related medical conditions such as mesothelioma, they need to know that they have limited time to file a legal claim — a legal principle known as a *statute of limitations*. If they fail to bring a claim within this time limit, their claims may be forfeited. While statutes of limitations can vary from state to state, most are one to three years from the date of diagnosis. You should consult with an attorney as soon as possible to learn which statute of limitations applies to your jurisdiction.

Similarly, family members of mesothelioma victims also have limited time to file a wrongful death claim following the passing of their loved ones. These statutes of limitations also vary from state to state, but most are one to three years from the date of death.

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What are asbestos bankruptcy trusts?

Many years ago, companies that made asbestos-containing products realized that there were going to be countless asbestos/mesothelioma victims for years to come, which meant many future lawsuits. As a result, many of these companies filed bankruptcy, during which they were required to set up trusts to provide compensation to future asbestos victims. Many of these trusts contain billions of dollars and are therefore available to compensate asbestos and mesothelioma victims.

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