

Currently an estimated 10,000 people die every year due to diseases caused by exposure to asbestos. The majority of these deaths are people who were exposed to asbestos at work during the peak period

Asbestos is a known health risk, and exposure to asbestos is known to be the sole cause of several diseases, and one cause of several types of cancer. Asbestos is dangerous because it is composed of mineral fibers that can be inhaled into the lungs if the fibers become airborne. Asbestos fibers are almost indestructible, and the body is unable to expel them once they have been inhaled. Over time, inhaled asbestos fibers cause chronic inflammation that can lead to the development of several diseases.

of asbestos use, between 1945 and 1980.



### **Known Health Risks of Asbestos Exposure**

Asbestosis develops only in the lungs of people who are repeatedly exposed to airborne asbestos fibers. Over time these fibers become lodged in the lungs, where they cause chronic irritation and inflammation. The lungs eventually become irreversibly damaged, leading to difficulty breathing, painful breathing, and coughing. Currently four in every 10,000 Americans is affected by asbestosis.

Mesothelioma is a type of cancer that develops only in people who have been exposed to asbestos. The cancer generally develops in the sac that lines lungs, but may also originate in the lining of the abdominal cavity or heart. Around three thousand new cases of mesothelioma are diagnosed each year.

Asbestosis and mesothelioma are devastating diseases that are difficult to detect and treat. Asbestos exposure is also a known cause of lung cancer. For more information on [asbestos cancer](#) and [mesothelioma treatment](#) see the resources at Asbestos.com.

Asbestos is likely to be present in any home that was built between the 1940s and the 1980s. Older homes renovated or repaired during this period are also likely contain some asbestos construction materials. A wide variety of construction materials were made using asbestos, including the following.

- Roofing materials, including tiles, felting, and adhesives.
- Insulation of all kinds, including wall insulation, electrical tape and wadding, thermal insulation around furnaces and stoves, and as pipe covering.
- Flooring was used in tile and sheet vinyl form. Adhesives used to affix flooring also contained asbestos.
- Textured plaster was used as an acoustical ceiling treatment and as a decorative element for walls and ceilings.
- Millboard, rollboard and other sheet products were used for wall framing. Joint compounds and plaster used to patch holes and seams also contained asbestos.



For further information about asbestos-containing materials, please see “Products Containing Asbestos.”

Asbestos-containing materials that are intact and in good condition do not present a high risk of asbestos exposure, as asbestos fibers are unlikely to become airborne. However, materials that are in poor condition or are beginning to deteriorate may need to be repaired. Asbestos-containing materials that are friable (able to be broken by hand) may need to be completely removed. Home renovations, repairs and demolition may also necessitate the removal of asbestos.

### **Repair and Removal**

Managing the risk of asbestos generally requires either repairing or removing asbestos-containing materials. In most situations, repairing materials is the preferred option, as often removal of asbestos-containing materials poses a higher health risk than leaving materials undisturbed.

- Encapsulation: the asbestos is covered with a sealant that traps asbestos fibers and prevents their release.
- Enclosing: the asbestos is covered with a protective wrap to prevent the release of asbestos fibers.

### **Respirator Use**

Due to the known health risks of inhalation asbestos fibers, a respirator should always be used in any situation where exposure to asbestos may occur. This includes both repair and removal of asbestos, and any other situation in which airborne asbestos fibers may be present in the environment.

When working with asbestos-containing materials of any kind, a respirator with a High Efficiency Particulate (HEPA) filter should be used.



### **Other Precautions**

Prior to repair or removal of asbestos, precautions should be taken to prevent asbestos fibers becoming airborne. The danger of this occurring will depend on the location of the asbestos and the type and condition of the materials involved.

- Limit or entirely cease activity in the area where asbestos-containing materials will be repaired or removed, to prevent further damage and release of fibers.
- Don't sweep, dust, or vacuum near asbestos-containing materials.
- Avoid sanding, scraping, or otherwise breaking or disturbing asbestos-containing

materials. The most vital way of preventing asbestos exposure is to hire an accredited professional for any repair and removal operations. Even a minor disturbance can cause the release of asbestos fibers, and while the use of a respirator may provide temporary protection, only

For more information on asbestos exposure and abatement please visit the [Mesothelioma Cancer Center](#).