

WHAT IS WORK-RELATED ASTHMA?

Some adults develop new asthma from breathing substances in the air at work. Other adults already have asthma that gets worse when they are at work. Both of these descriptions are considered work-related asthma. 15% of adults with asthma have work-related asthma. That's almost 1 out of every 6 adult asthmatics. In some cases work-related asthma has proven to be fatal.



WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF WORK-RELATED ASTHMA?

Common symptoms can be:

- ◆ Wheezing
- ◆ Cough
- ◆ Chest Tightness
- ◆ Feeling Short of Breath

These symptoms can develop immediately after being exposed to an asthma-causing substance, or later in the day, or at home after work. At first, symptoms may go away or get better on days you do not work. With repeated exposure, symptoms will occur at home as well as at work. Typically, months or even years working with an asthma-causing substance will pass before any symptoms develop.

WHAT CAUSES WORK-RELATED ASTHMA?

Asthma attacks can happen when a person is exposed to substances called sensitizers or triggers.

People with work-related asthma may have different substances that trigger their asthma.

There are over 400 substances that can cause asthma in the workplace.

Some examples of these substances are:

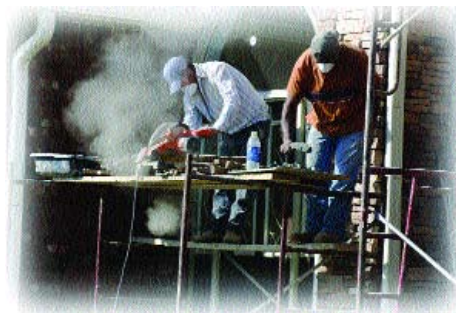
- Chemicals in paints and cleaning products
- Isocyanates
- Metal working fluids
- Animals and insects
- Dusts from wood, grain, flour, and latex
- Some glues and resins

WHO GETS WORK-RELATED ASTHMA?

A person could work with these substances in many different jobs and industries, such as:

- ✗ Factories that make auto parts
- ✗ Working with laboratory animals
- ✗ Shops that spray paint vehicles
- ✗ Hospitals, schools and stores
- ✗ Shops that do wood working
- ✗ Flour mills and bakeries
- ✗ Chemical workers

These are just a few examples.



WHAT CAN YOU DO AT WORK IF YOU DO HAVE WORK-RELATED ASTHMA?

There are several solutions to help make your workplace healthier. Your employer could:

Transfer you to an area where the substance is not used.

Stop using the sensitizer, by replacing it with a less harmful substance.

If this is not possible, your employer could:

Separate the work that poses a risk to your health, or totally enclose the process.

If this is not possible, your employer could:

Partially enclose the process, provide local exhaust ventilation and a face mask.

For certain exposures such as isocyanates, it is recommended that you not continue to work in the same building once you are sensitized.

If the above solutions are carried out and still the exposure is not adequately controlled, you may have to find another job so that your asthma does not get worse with continued exposure.

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF YOUR ASTHMA IS WORK-RELATED?

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are there things at work that make your asthma get worse or start an attack?
- Does your asthma start or get worse soon after you start work, or as a result of certain activities at work?
- Does your asthma get worse when you go back to work after being away from work on weekends or vacations?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, something at work may be causing your breathing problems.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE WORK-RELATED ASTHMA?

Talk to your doctor. Under your doctor's guidance, you can:

Keep a daily record of your asthma. Keep track of what your asthma is like, and when it seems to get better or worse.

Talk to your Health & Safety representative. Ask to look at the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) to see if you work with any asthma triggers. You have a right to see these sheets and to get copies for your doctor.

Ask for a referral to a doctor who specializes in work-related asthma.

HOW CAN YOU GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT WORK-RELATED ASTHMA?

*There are many resources available to
find out more about asthma:*

*The Asthma Initiative of Michigan (AIM) provides excellent details
on asthma for patients, doctors, schools and more:*

www.getastmahelp.org

Michigan State University has an occupational health website with work-related asthma resources and links:

www.oem.msu.edu

The Association of Occupational and Environmental Clinics (AOEC) provides an on-line look-up tool for known work-related asthma-causing agents:

www.aoc.org



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WHAT EVERY WORKER SHOULD KNOW!

