

What is Asbestos?

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

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
- 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

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.

What to Do If You Have Asbestos in Your Home

If you think there may be asbestos in your home, don't panic.

Asbestos-containing materials that aren't damaged or disturbed are not likely to pose a health risk. Usually the best thing is to leave asbestos-containing material alone if it is in good condition.

Generally, asbestos-containing material that is in good condition and will not be disturbed (by remodeling, for example) will not release asbestos fibers.

Asbestos-containing materials may release fibers when they are disturbed, damaged, removed improperly, repaired, cut, torn, sanded, sawed, drilled or scraped. Keep an eye on asbestos-containing materials and visually check them over time for signs of wear or damage.

If you suspect material contains asbestos, don't touch it. Look for signs of wear or damage such as tears, abrasions, or water damage. Damaged material may release asbestos fibers. This is particularly true if you often disturb it by hitting, rubbing or handling, or if it is exposed to extreme vibration or air flow.

For slightly damaged asbestos-containing material, sometimes the best way to deal with it is to limit access to the area and not to touch or disturb it. If asbestos-containing material is more than slightly damaged or if you are going to make changes in your home that might disturb it, repair or removal by a trained and accredited asbestos professional is needed.

Information obtained from EPA.gov website