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Illnesses Associated with Asbestos Exposure

There are several illnesses associated with asbestos exposure. The most common include lung cancer, mesothelioma, and asbestosis.

Lung Cancer

Lung cancer causes the largest number of asbestos-related deaths. The incidence of lung cancer in people who are or were directly involved in the mining, milling, manufacturing and use of asbestos and its related products is much higher than in the general population. The most common symptoms of lung cancer are coughing and a noticeable change in breathing. Other symptoms include shortness of breath, persistent chest pains, hoarseness, and anemia.

People who have been exposed to asbestos and are also exposed to other carcinogens -- such as those in cigarette smoke -- have a significantly greater risk of developing lung cancer than people who have been exposed only to asbestos itself. One study indicates that asbestos workers who smoke are about 90 times more likely to develop lung cancer than people who neither smoke nor have been exposed to asbestos.

Mesothelioma

Mesothelioma is a rare form of cancer that most often occurs in the thin membrane lining of the lungs, chest, and abdomen. There are approximately 200 new cases of mesothelioma diagnosed each year in the United States. Virtually all cases of mesothelioma are linked to asbestos exposure.

An increased risk of mesothelioma is especially present in people who have worked in asbestos mines, asbestos mills and factories, and shipyards that use asbestos, as well as those who manufacture and install asbestos insulation. In addition, people who live with asbestos workers, near asbestos mining areas, near asbestos and product factories, or near shipyards where asbestos is present, may be at a greater risk. Such areas produce large quantities of airborne asbestos fibers.

Mesothelioma is more likely to develop in people who inhaled asbestos when they were young. This is why today, enormous efforts are being made to prevent school children from being exposed to asbestos.

[More](#) on mesothelioma.

Asbestosis

Asbestosis is a serious, chronic, non-cancerous respiratory disease. Asbestosis starts when inhaled asbestos fibers aggravate lung tissues, causing the tissue to scar. Symptoms of asbestosis may include shortness of breath and a dry crackling sound in the lungs while inhaling. The disease may eventually cause cardiac failure in its advanced stages.

There is no known effective treatment for asbestosis, and the disease is usually disabling or fatal. The risk of asbestosis is minimal for those who have never worked with asbestos, and the disease is rarely caused by neighborhood or family exposure. However, those who renovate or demolish buildings that contain asbestos may be at significant risk. The seriousness of the risk depends on the nature of the exposure and the safety precautions taken.

See also:

- [Who is at Risk for Asbestos-Related Illnesses?](#)

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