

Questions and answers about asbestos and dust in outdoor air

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is the name given to a group of fibrous minerals that occur naturally in the environment. Asbestos fibers are strong, flexible, and heat resistant and have been used over the years for a wide range of building materials and manufactured goods, among them: roofing shingles, ceiling and floor tiles, paper products, and asbestos cement products, friction products (automobile clutch, brake, and transmission parts), heat-resistant fabrics, packaging, gaskets and coatings.

How is someone exposed to asbestos?

We are all exposed to low levels of asbestos in the air we breathe, though levels are generally higher in cities and industrial areas. Higher levels of exposure occur most often when the asbestos-containing material is disturbed during demolition work, which releases fibers into the air. Undisturbed or buried asbestos-containing materials release very few fibers into the air.

What are the health concerns of asbestos exposure?

It is known that long-term exposure to high levels of asbestos can be harmful to human health. When invisible asbestos fibers are disturbed, they can be inhaled and lodge in the lungs. Continued exposure increases the number of fibers that lodge in the lungs. Fibers embedded in lung tissue over many years may result in lung diseases such as asbestosis, lung cancer, or mesothelioma (a type of cancer). These diseases are a risk primarily for workers exposed to high levels of asbestos for years or decades. Asbestosis and mesothelioma are very rare in people who did not work in asbestos industries. There are no immediate symptoms from exposure to asbestos. Though no level of exposure to asbestos is completely safe, the risk of disease is directly related to how much you are exposed to, how often you are exposed and for how long your exposure lasts.

Is dust a health concern?

Soil disturbance at construction or demolition sites can produce dust particles that are made up of different materials and vary in size. Small dust particles can become airborne and can be inhaled. Whether or not asbestos is present, breathing dust can cause short-term health effects such as eye, nose, throat and lung irritation, coughing, sneezing, runny nose and shortness of breath. Exposure to high levels of very small dust particles in air can also affect lung function and worsen medical conditions such as asthma and heart disease. Visible dust that settles on outdoor surfaces such as cars or porches is made up of relatively large particles that when disturbed and inhaled do not reach the deepest parts of the lungs; however, breathing these particles can still be irritating to the sinuses and throat.

How can I reduce my exposure to dust in and around my home?

Families can lower dust exposures by regularly cleaning the home of dust and tracked-in soil. To reduce dust exposure in homes, use damp cleaning methods. Mop floors often, and use damp cloths to clean tables, countertops and windowsills. To reduce the amount of soil that is tracked into the home, use a door mat or rug and remove your shoes when entering the home. Outdoors, damp-wipe dusty surfaces and hose down dusty shrubs and lawns to reduce the amount of surface dust that may be released into the air or enter the home on shoes.

Health care resources available:

You may want to talk to your doctor or other health care provider. If you do not have a doctor, below is a list of Suffolk County Health Clinics, as well as occupational and environmental medicine centers.

Suffolk County and Affiliated Health Centers:

Amityville - The Maxine S. Postal Tri-Community Health Center at Amityville

1080 Sunrise Highway, Amityville, NY 11701
(631) 854-1000

Brentwood - The Suffolk County Brentwood Family Health Center

1869 Brentwood Road, Brentwood, NY 11717
(631) 853-3400

Coram - The Elsie Owens Health Center at Coram

82 Middle Country Road, Coram, NY 11727
(631) 320-2220
Operated by Hudson River HealthCare

Greenlawn - The Dolan Family Health Center at Greenlawn

284 Pulaski Road, Greenlawn, NY 11740
(631) 425-5250/For an appointment call 425-5250
Operated by Huntington Hospital

Patchogue - The South Brookhaven Family Health Center at Patchogue

365 East Main Street, Patchogue, NY 11772
(631) 854-1300

Riverhead - The Suffolk County Health Center at Riverhead

County Center, 300 Center Drive, Riverhead, NY 11901
(631) 852-1800

Shirley - The Marilyn Shellabarger South Brookhaven Family Health Center East at Shirley

550 Montauk Highway & Dorsett Place, Shirley, NY 11967
(631) 852-1000

Southampton - HRHCare Kraus Family Health Center of the Hamptons (link:

<http://www.hrhcare.org/medical-clinics/hrhcare-kraus-family-health-center-hamptons>)

330 Meeting House Lane, Southampton, NY 11968
(631) 268-1008
Operated by Hudson River HealthCare, Inc.

Wyandanch - The Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Health Center at Wyandanch

1556 Straight Path, Wyandanch, NY 11798
(631) 854-1700

Occupational and Environmental Health Centers:

Occupational and Environmental Medicine

2035 Lakeville Road
3rd Floor
New Hyde Park, NY 11040

Phone: (516) 492-3297

Fax: (516) 492-3299

E-mail: OEMLI@nshs.edu

Occupational and Environmental Medicine

487 Lake Avenue
St. James, NY 11780

Phone: (631) 686-6390

Fax: (631) 584-8063

E-mail: OEMLI@nshs.edu

Pediatric Environmental Specialty Unit at Mount Sinai

Mount Sinai Hospital
New York City, NY

Phone: (866) 265-6201

For information requests regarding the Roberto Clemente Park:

- For questions regarding the Roberto Clemente Park, please call the Town of Islip at 1-888-674-7501
- For questions regarding personal health resources, please contact Amy Juchatz of the Suffolk County Department of Health Services at 631-854-0088 (between the hours of 9 am and 5 pm)
- For general questions about asbestos, visit the New York State Department of Health web site <http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/indoors/asbestos/>; or call 518-402-7800
- For general questions about dust, visit the New York State Department of Health web site <http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/indoors/air/pmqa.htm> or call 518-402-7820 or 800-458-1158
- For general questions regarding air quality, contact the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation web site http://www.dec.ny.gov/cfm/xtapps/aqi/aqi_forecast.cfm and/or phone 1-800-535-1345
- For questions about water quality, contact the Suffolk County Department of Health Services, Office of Water Resources at 631-852-5810