

Your Lungs Your Work Your Life:

What you should know
about work-related
asthma



What is work-related asthma?

Asthma is a lung disease that makes it hard to breathe. During an asthma attack, the airways in your lungs become narrow and too much mucus is produced.



Work-related asthma is a type of asthma. Some workers can develop asthma from chemicals, dusts, or other exposures at work. Other workers already have asthma that is made worse by their work exposures.

What are the symptoms of work-related asthma?

- Wheezing
- Chest Tightness
- Shortness of Breath
- Coughing

Symptoms usually occur when workers are exposed to a certain substance at work. Sometimes symptoms may start several hours after the worker leaves work and then get better before coming back to work the next day.

What causes work-related asthma?

There are hundreds of exposures in the workplace that can cause work-related asthma. Some examples include:

- Cedar wood dust
- Chemicals in polyurethane paints
- Animals and insects
- Grain and flour dust
- Latex gloves
- Cleaning agents

Who gets work-related asthma?

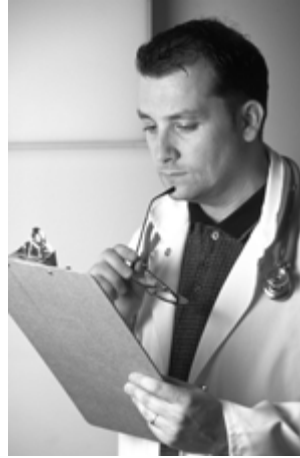
Workers in many different jobs can get work-related asthma. Some examples common in Washington include:

- Sawmill workers
- Healthcare providers
- Spray painters
- Janitors and cleaners
- Manufacturing workers
- Farm laborers



How is work-related asthma diagnosed?

Your doctor can decide if you have work-related asthma. First, your doctor will ask you about your medical history and breathing symptoms. Then tests may be done to determine if you have asthma and



not some other kind of lung condition.

These tests may include:

- Physical exam of your chest
- Chest x-ray
- Blood tests
- Breathing tests

If your doctor has confirmed that you do have asthma, then your doctor may do more tests to decide if your asthma is related to your work.

If you have questions or are concerned about your breathing, see your doctor now. Asthma is a serious disease. If untreated, it may severely affect your health or even cause death. Work-related asthma can get better if diagnosed early and treated properly.

Can work-related asthma be prevented?

Yes, there are steps your employer can take to make your workplace healthier:

- Change the way things are done to remove or reduce exposures.
- Improve the ventilation.
- Provide respirators.
- Provide training.
- Conduct medical monitoring to find workers with symptoms early.

There are steps you can take too:

- Identify the substances in your work area that cause or make your asthma worse.
- Use a properly fitted facemask when working around asthma-causing substances.
- Move to a different work area, if possible. Because changing jobs may cause financial hardship, this should only be done after talking to your doctor.
- Stop smoking.

Work-related asthma must be diagnosed and treated early or it may become a chronic (lifelong) illness. Therefore, it is important to see your doctor now if you think you may have work-related asthma.

Some workers might have a higher risk because of a family or personal history of allergy or asthma. These workers should talk to their doctor before entering trades with a lot of chemicals or dust.



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