icare™

Dust Diseases Care

Asbestosis

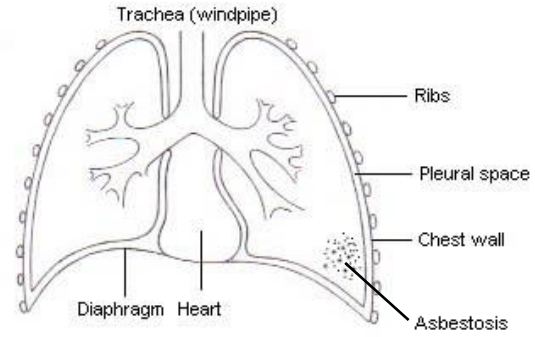
Dust diseases are a group of lung diseases caused by inhaling certain products when they are in powder or dust form. Asbestosis is a type of dust disease.

Lots of different types of dusts can be easily inhaled into the lungs, but not all of them are harmful to your health. Your lungs have natural defence mechanisms that are normally able to expel most dusts. Unfortunately, sometimes these mechanisms can't completely remove dusts such as asbestos. Why? Because asbestos dust is made up of sharp, microscopic fibres that can get stuck in the lung tissue and, over time, cause inflammation and scarring.

What is asbestosis?

Asbestosis is a chronic lung disease that is usually seen on x-rays as scarring – called 'fibrosis' – of the lung tissue. It's caused by heavy exposure to asbestos dust.

Occurring mainly in the lower half of the lungs, the severity and speed with which the scarring develops will depend on the amount of asbestos dust in the air and the total length of time a person has spent breathing in that dust. Not every person who has had heavy exposure to asbestos dust will develop asbestosis.



What are the symptoms of asbestosis?

Asbestosis can take many years to arise after the asbestos exposure has occurred. Some people may not have any symptoms at all. If symptoms do develop, they usually include a constant dry cough, chronic chest tightness and shortness of breath. These symptoms occur because scar tissue causes the lungs to stiffen.

How is asbestosis diagnosed?

A complete medical evaluation is needed before a proper asbestosis diagnosis can be made. This includes reviewing possible asbestos exposure, the duration of that exposure and symptoms. Various tests and scans are typically undertaken to detect lung abnormalities.

Asbestosis causes rough breathing sounds, so a doctor will generally hear a dry, crackling sound when they listen to a person's chest with a stethoscope. Chest X-Rays can also reveal the usual scarring pattern of asbestosis inside the lungs, which is then usually confirmed by a CT scan. Asbestosis can cause restricted breathing and this is measured using a lung function test.

There are other causes of scarring in the lungs that may not be the result of asbestos exposure. Determining a person's total exposure to asbestos is important to correctly diagnose asbestosis.

Is there any treatment for asbestosis?

Asbestosis usually continues to develop over time and the damage it causes to the lungs cannot be reversed. Although there is no cure for asbestosis, treatments are available to relieve the symptoms. There are some changes to lifestyle and diet that people can make to feel better, and research is underway to determine if exercise may improve lung capacity and quality of life. Oxygen therapy can help some people with their shortness of breath. You should consult your own respiratory specialist with any questions about your treatment options.

I've been diagnosed with asbestosis, but I'm not entitled to compensation. Why?

Dust Diseases Care awards compensation based on the amount disablement from a dust disease that has occurred because of work related exposure to asbestos dust. This disablement is measured by the lung function test. Not everyone with asbestosis will develop associated symptoms or disablement.

We offer and can arrange regular medical examinations to workers who have a dust disease, to check if there has been any change in their disability level.

Will Dust Diseases Care pay for medical treatment and services?

If you are entitled to compensation, then we will pay for any reasonably necessary treatment or service that's directly related to your asbestosis.

Would you like more information?

If you have any questions at all or would like more information, please contact Dust Diseases Care by calling (02) 8223 6600 or 1800 550 027 (toll free), or emailing DDAenquiries@icare.nsw.gov.au.

You can also find more information about Dust Diseases Care and our services on our website www.icare.nsw.gov.au