

## Introduction

Breathing in certain workplace dusts, gases, fumes, and vapours may cause serious, long-term lung damage. Every year, thousands die from respiratory ill health related to their work.

These illnesses may be categorized in several ways that include:

**Obstructive pulmonary disorders** such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, emphysema.

**Restrictive Disorders** caused by inflammation of lung tissue that eventually scars the lung tissue leading to a reduction in lung volume.

**Other conditions** such as asbestosis and lung cancers.

## Symptoms

If you suffer any of the following symptoms, you should raise them with your employer or Occupational Health professional at the earliest opportunity:

- Sore eyes.
- Wheezing.
- Chest Tightness.
- Regular blocked or running nose.
- Sore throat.
- Coughing.
- Breathlessness.

## Smoking

Smoking, although a lifestyle choice, probably causes more harm than most workplace airborne contaminants.

In addition, it often increases likelihood (and severity) of airborne contaminants causing serious medical conditions. Smoking is addictive and it is difficult to quit, but stopping is probably the single most useful way to improve your respiratory health.

## What are my employer's obligations?

Your employer is obliged by law to control the risks to workers from exposure to hazardous substances.

Breathing in dust, gases, fumes, and vapours in the workplace can cause serious, long-term lung damage. Often, this can be due to being exposed to a substance many years before. By protecting workers effectively, they can prevent them from suffering from severe, often incurable, lung-related health problems in the future.

## Identifying risks to your workers

If workers could be exposed to hazardous substances, the employer must assess and manage the risk to them.

Some common hazardous substances are:

- silica dust – found in stone, rock, sand, and clays.
- welding fumes.
- flour dust.
- wood dust.
- asbestos (for work involving asbestos specific regulations and guidance apply).

## Respiratory Health Surveillance

Health surveillance is a scheme of repeated health checks which are used to identify ill health caused by work. Health and safety law requires health surveillance when your workers remain exposed to health risks even after you have put controls in place. Employees have a duty to comply with any health surveillance requirements that have been deemed necessary. For respiratory risks, these may include:

**Respiratory Questionnaire:** Useful as a general screening tool and for some non-sensitizing agents.

**Questionnaire & Spirometry:** The assessment for choice for exposure to astmagens, sensitizing agents and other obstruction causing substances.

**Chest X-Ray (CXR):** Often used in addition to spirometry for the identification of Asbestos related illness and those problems related to the inhalation of Respirable Crystalline Silica (RCS) such as silicosis.

Information for this leaflet was partly taken from the Health & Safety Executives website. Further information may be found at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/lung-disease/about.htm>

A copy of this information leaflet can be downloaded from: <https://mohs.co.uk/>

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## Occupational Lung Disease - A Guide for Workers



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