

Introduction

Some airborne workplace contaminants can cause allergies when inhaled. These substances are called *Respiratory Sensitisers*. They can quickly cause permanent damage to the nose, throat, and lungs.

If this happens, further exposure, sometimes to even minute quantities, may result in allergic symptoms such as itchy or runny eyes and nose.

These may be accompanied or followed by other, more severe symptoms of asthma such as wheezing, tightness of chest, breathlessness or coughing.

Asthma attacks can be fatal.

Symptoms do not occur on first exposure to the substance. Most cases of sensitisation occur during the first two years of exposure, often in the first few months, but sometimes they appear only after decades of exposure. Symptoms are often most severe in the evening or during the night and you may not associate them with work. However, improvement in symptoms during weekends and holidays often points to an occupational cause.



REMEMBER! If you develop any of these symptoms which tend to improve when you are away from work, go and see your manager or health and safety representative and your doctor.

What sort of substances cause these symptoms?

A wide variety of substances can cause these symptoms if you breathe them in. However, you should be especially vigilant if you work with:

- Isocyanates.
- Flour/grain dust.
- Glutaraldehyde.
- Wood dusts.
- Soldering flux.
- Latex.
- Laboratory animals.
- Some glues or resins.

REMEMBER! Always read the label

What can you do?

Your employer is responsible for protecting you from exposure to these and other harmful substances, but you also have a role to play. You can do this by:

- Complying with all health & safety precautions at your work.
- Ensuring that you use all the control measures provided.
- Using, when necessary, all personal protective equipment (PPE) provided. And storing your it when not in use so that they are not contaminated by the substances you work with
- Reporting to your manager, health and safety representative and your doctor if you develop the above symptoms if they tend to improve when you are away from work.

REMEMBER! If you develop occupational asthma, you may have breathing difficulties all your life – avoid exposure and breathe freely!

Further information

If you wish to know more, please visit the HSE's website:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/lung-disease/index.htm>

Asthma at Work Charter gives advice on how to make workplaces safer for people with asthma. Contact Asthma UK

Tel: 0800 121 6244

Website: www.asthma.org.uk.

Asthma UK has a section of their website devoted to Occupational Asthma:

<https://www.asthma.org.uk/advice/understanding-asthma/types/occupational-asthma/>

Information in this leaflet is based on HSE document *indg172(rev1)*.

The original document can be found here:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg172.htm>

A copy of this information leaflet can be downloaded from:

<https://mohs.co.uk/>

23.6 Occupational Asthma – A Guide for Workers



mohs
workplace health

MOHS Workplace Health Ltd

*83 Birmingham Road
West Bromwich
B70 6PX
0121 601 4041
www.mohs.co.uk*