

## If you think you might have Work-Related Asthma, you need to:

1. Contact the New Jersey Department of Health & Senior Services (NJDHSS) to learn more about work-related asthma.
2. Talk to your doctor about your asthma and your work.
3. Ask your doctor to report your asthma to the NJDHSS.

New Jersey Law **REQUIRES** that physicians and advanced practice nurses report individuals diagnosed with work-related asthma.

## What happens when I contact the NJDHSS?

A healthcare professional will talk to you and your doctor. He or she will provide helpful information to determine the cause of your asthma.

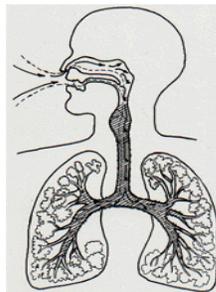
If you agree, a NJDHSS occupational health professional will contact your employer and help identify and control your exposure to the substance causing your asthma.

**Your identity will never be revealed.**

## Questions? Concerns? Want more information? Contact us:

Work-Related Asthma Surveillance Coordinator  
NJ Department of Health & Senior Services  
Occupational Health Surveillance Program  
PO Box 360  
Trenton NJ 08625-0360  
Phone: (609) 984-1863  
E-mail: [surveillance@doh.state.nj.us](mailto:surveillance@doh.state.nj.us)  
Internet: [www.nj.gov/health/eoh/survweb](http://www.nj.gov/health/eoh/survweb)

## What are the symptoms of asthma?



The symptoms of asthma include:

- ◆ wheezing
- ◆ a tight feeling in the chest
- ◆ coughing
- ◆ shortness of breath
- ◆ difficulty breathing

## What is Work-Related Asthma?

Work-related asthma is a disease in which the lungs react to dusts, mists, vapors, gases, or fumes that are in the workplace. These can be allergens or irritants.

The two major types of work-related asthma are:

- 1) New-onset asthma – a healthy worker gets symptoms for the first time while at work.
- 2) Work-aggravated asthma – pre-existing asthma is worse at work.

Symptoms of work-related asthma usually occur while or after a worker is exposed to a particular substance at work. However, some workers will only get symptoms many hours after leaving work.

Symptoms usually go away during weekends or vacations, and return after going back to work.

Work-related asthma is usually reversible. But permanent lung damage, or even death, can occur if exposure to the substance that causes the disease continues. In some workers, very small amounts of the substance can cause an asthma attack.

## What causes Work-Related Asthma?

There are all sorts of substances in the workplace that may cause work-related asthma. Here are some examples:

- ◆ chemicals in polyurethane paints, cleaning materials, and other products
- ◆ latex rubber
- ◆ grain and flour dust
- ◆ dust (dander) from animals and insects
- ◆ molds

## Who gets Work-Related Asthma?

Workers in hundreds of jobs are potentially exposed to substances in the air that may cause work-related asthma. Here are some examples of jobs in New Jersey where work-related asthma has been diagnosed:

- ◆ health care workers
- ◆ hairdressers
- ◆ janitors and housekeeping staff
- ◆ bakery workers
- ◆ animal handlers



**Every breath counts!**

## How is Work-Related Asthma diagnosed?

Your doctor should give you a complete physical exam and look at your medical history. He or she should ask you what you do at work and what materials you work with at your job. Your doctor should also ask if your symptoms started at work or get worse at work. There are special tests that your doctor can do to help diagnose asthma that is related to your job.



## How can Work-Related Asthma attacks be prevented?

If your asthma is work-related, there are steps that should be taken to make your workplace healthier. Your employer is required by Federal safety laws to promote a safe and healthy workplace. For example:

**Elimination/Substitution** – Your employer may be able to stop using the substance that causes your asthma attacks or find a different substance to use.

**Ventilation** – There are special ventilation systems that can be installed to remove substances from the air before you breathe them.

**Respirators** – Your employer can provide you with a respirator. A respirator can prevent you from breathing the substance that causes your asthma attacks. Wearing a respirator requires medical approval and training.

**Skin Protection** – You can wear the right kind of gloves and/or aprons to protect your skin when working with chemicals.

**Good Housekeeping/Work Practices** – Clean-up and other jobs that cause asthma attacks can be done in ways that stop the release of substances into the air.

**Training** – You need to know what jobs may be bad for your health and how to protect yourself.

## Who can I contact for more information?

For more information about work-related asthma, use the Internet resources listed below or contact the NJDHSS:

Work-Related Asthma Surveillance Coordinator  
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PO Box 360  
Trenton NJ 08625-0360  
Phone: (609) 984-1863  
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Internet: [www.nj.gov/health/eoh/survweb](http://www.nj.gov/health/eoh/survweb)

### Internet Resources:

**US Environmental Protection Agency**  
*Asthma and indoor environments*  
[www.epa.gov/iaq/asthma](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/asthma)

**American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology**  
- *Asthma and immunology*  
- *Patient education*  
[www.aaaai.org/patients/resources/fastfacts/asthma.stm](http://www.aaaai.org/patients/resources/fastfacts/asthma.stm)

**American Lung Association**  
*Adult asthma information*  
[www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org)

**Asthma & Allergies Association**  
*Agents and occupations associated with work-related asthma*  
[www.asmanet.com/asmapro/asmawork.htm#start](http://www.asmanet.com/asmapro/asmawork.htm#start)

**Association of Occupational and Environmental Clinics**  
*List of substances found in the workplace that can cause work-related asthma*  
[www.aoec.org/aoeccode.htm#](http://www.aoec.org/aoeccode.htm#)

# Do You Have Work-Related Asthma?

Ask yourself these **2** simple questions:

- #1** – Do your asthma symptoms usually start or get worse when you are at work and get better when you are away from work?
- #2** – Are there any materials or activities at your job that you try to avoid because they make your asthma symptoms worse?

If you answered “Yes” to either of these questions...you may have **work-related asthma.**

## What should I do?

- ◆ Contact the New Jersey Department of Health & Senior Services (NJDHSS) and ask for information about work-related asthma
- ◆ Ask your doctor to report your asthma to the NJDHSS. Help us prevent work-related asthma.

Occupational Health Service  
Occupational Health Surveillance Program



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