

# Asbestos in schools

## Exposure concerns – information for departmental workers

Like many older buildings in Queensland, schools may have asbestos in building materials. We understand that you may have concerns about the health implications for people in these environments. This information flyer aims to help departmental employees better understand the risks associated with asbestos and how it is managed within a school environment.

### Factors that contribute to asbestos risk

Although asbestos is a hazardous material it only poses a risk to health if the fibres are disturbed, become airborne and are inhaled. If inhaled most fibres are removed from your lungs by your body's natural defences (for example, coughing).

The concept that 'one fibre can kill' is not supported by scientific evidence. Everyone has had some exposure to asbestos fibres which appears to be tolerated by most people without causing asbestos related diseases\*.

The risk to health increases with the number of fibres inhaled and with the frequency of exposure. Global health statistics demonstrate that the majority of asbestos-related diseases result from occupational exposure where workers have been exposed to asbestos disturbance events repeatedly over a number of years.

### What if you believe asbestos exposure has occurred?

In the event you have concerns about potential exposure to asbestos from an asbestos-related incident, you may request access to the Department's Chief Health Advisor for greater explanation of asbestos risk and its relationship with the incident of concern. If you continue to have concerns about potential exposure, you should:

- submit a MyHR incident report
- register your details on the National Asbestos Exposure Register: [www.asbestossafety.gov.au/national-asbestos-exposure-register/online](http://www.asbestossafety.gov.au/national-asbestos-exposure-register/online)
- invite your treating doctor to contact the Department's Chief Health Advisor for further advice as required.

### Departmental response to asbestos-related incidents

The key steps in response to asbestos-related incidents are:

- all work in the area is stopped and persons in the vicinity are removed
- access to the area restricted by locking the door or installing barricades with signage

\*[www.asbestos.qld.gov.au/general-information/are-there-health-effects](http://www.asbestos.qld.gov.au/general-information/are-there-health-effects)

- reporting the incident
- professionals engaged to make the area safe as required
- investigation of incident circumstances and identification of preventative and corrective actions
- communication of outcomes (that is, sampling and test results) as relevant
- preventative measures actioned.

These requirements are set out in the Department's Asbestos incident management procedure:

[www.education.qld.gov.au/about-us/reporting-data-research/reporting/asbestos-management/policy-and-procedures/policy](http://www.education.qld.gov.au/about-us/reporting-data-research/reporting/asbestos-management/policy-and-procedures/policy)

### Notifiable incidents

Asbestos-related incidents that meet the definition of a 'dangerous incident' under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* require notification to the Work Health and Safety Regulator. The term 'dangerous incident' relates to whether the timeframe of disturbance was sufficient to give rise to a concentration of airborne asbestos fibres which are likely to create a 'serious' risk to health. The area of a notifiable incident cannot be reoccupied until a competent person has conducted a clearance inspection including air monitoring.

Talk to a member of your facility asbestos management team for more information on whether or not a particular incident is notifiable. You can find out who is on the team by viewing the Facility Asbestos Management Poster which is displayed at the central control point for the facility and in every staffroom.

### Further information

The Department's Chief Health Advisor, Dr Keith Adam, and Education Queensland have developed a series of short asbestos 'vodcasts' designed to provide viewers with factual information about asbestos-related illness.

View vodcasts at [www.education.qld.gov.au/about-us/reporting-data-research/reporting/asbestos-management](http://www.education.qld.gov.au/about-us/reporting-data-research/reporting/asbestos-management)



For more information, please visit [www.asbestos.qld.gov.au](http://www.asbestos.qld.gov.au)



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