



New York City Department of Health Response to the World Trade Center Disaster

Public Health Advisory Concerning Air Quality in the Affected Area of the World Trade Center Disaster

The NYC Department of Health (DOH), in collaboration with the City, State, and Federal agencies, is closely monitoring and analyzing air quality data in the wake of the World Trade Center disaster. Following the collapse of the Twin Towers, significant quantities of smoke and dust have been released into the air. The plume of smoke contained dust, ash, soot, and other burning materials present at the site.

In general, dusts can cause respiratory symptoms and eye and throat irritation. Because dust will continue to remain in the air during the ensuing clean-up efforts following the World Trade Center disaster, residents in the vicinity of the World Trade Center are encouraged to take precautions when they return to their homes.

What are the Recommendations for Residents Living in Lower Manhattan?

All residents in the immediate vicinity of the World Trade Center - particularly those who live the area bounded by Warren Street to the North, Broadway to the East, the Hudson River to the West, and Exchange and Thames Streets to the South - should take the following precautions when they return to their homes:

- Avoid unnecessary outdoor strenuous activity;
- Avoid sweeping or other outdoor maintenance;
- Keep dust from entering the home (e.g., remove shoes before entering the home);
- Keep windows closed;
- Set the air conditioner to recirculate air (closed vents), and clean or change the filter frequently;

What should I do if I experience respiratory symptoms?

Dust and other particulate matter have the greatest impact on persons with underlying respiratory conditions. Such individuals may experience chest tightness, wheezing, and shortness of breath. Anyone who has difficulty breathing should consult their physicians, especially those with underlying respiratory conditions. People with asthma may need to increase their usual medical treatment with more frequent use of bronchodilators, and should consult their physicians if necessary.

If I experience any eye irritation what should I do?

Ocular saline solutions or tap water may be used to rinse eyes irritated by dust. All persons should avoid wearing contact lenses while in the affected area.

What are the health effects of asbestos?

Destruction of the World Trade Center buildings released large amounts of dust and ash, some of which

contained trace amounts of asbestos. Based on the asbestos test results received thus far, the general public's risk for any short or long term adverse health effects are very low. Residents who live near the affected area are not at risk of developing asbestos-related illness following the collapse of the World Trade Center buildings.

In general, asbestos-related lung disease general results only from intense asbestos exposure experienced over a period of many years, primarily as a consequence of occupational exposures. The risk of developing an asbestos-related illness following an exposure of short duration is very low.

What measures are being taken to protect the rescue workers?

Rescue workers have been equipped with half-face masks, goggles, and protective clothing to reduce their exposure to dust and other particulate matter while working in the blast zone.

How can I clean up dusts in or near my home or office?

The best way to remove dust is to use a wet rag or wet mop. Sweeping with a dry broom is not recommended because it can make dust airborne again. Dirty rags should be put in plastic bags while they are still wet and bags should be sealed and discarded (cloth rags can be washed, see instructions below). Rags should not be allowed to dry out before bagging and disposal or washing. Because the dust particles are so small, standard vacuuming is not an efficient way to remove the dust. High efficiency vacuums, which are now widely available in stores, should be used to remove dust. Carpets and upholstery can be shampooed, then vacuumed.

Persons should shower to rinse off any dust from hair and skin. Dusty clothes should be washed separately from other clothing. Pets can be washed with running water from a hose or faucet; their paws should be wiped to avoid tracking dust inside the home. To clean plants, rinse leaves with water. Throw away any food that may have been contaminated with dust. Food in cans, jars or containers with tight-fitting lids do not need to be discarded. However, if there is dust present on the exterior of vacuum-sealed food containers, just wash the can or jar with water and wipe it clean. If in doubt, throw it out.

Air purifiers may help reduce indoor dust levels. High efficiency air purifiers are superior to other models in filtering the smallest particles. Air purifiers are only useful for removing dust from the air. They will not remove dust already deposited on floors, shelves, upholstery or rugs. Keep windows closed when using an air purifier.

Do pregnant women and young children need to take additional precautions?

No. Pregnant women and young children do not need to take additional precautions.

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