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Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
Questions and Answers
Exposure to Asbestos in Insulation

How do I know if my insulation contains asbestos?

The only sure way to know is to have insulation samples collected by a state-certified inspector and then have the samples analyzed by a state-certified testing laboratory.

Is my family at risk of exposure to asbestos if we have renovated and removed or otherwise disturbed the asbestos insulation?

Asbestos fibers are microscopic. These tiny fibers can be present in the dust in an area where asbestos insulation is disturbed. If you observed a lot of dust when removing or disturbing the asbestos, it is possible that you inhaled some asbestos fibers. Usually, however, it takes more exposure than a few trips to the attic to develop the health problems associated with exposure to asbestos.

If you are concerned about possible exposure, consult a physician who specializes in environmental or occupational medicine. It usually takes many years after an exposure for symptoms to develop; however, you should see a doctor if you develop problems breathing or notice any change in your breathing ability.

I need to have asbestos insulation removed, what should I do?

There are specialized firms that are certified in removing asbestos safely. You may be able to locate these firms through your state, county, or local health department. If you think you have asbestos insulation, do not attempt to remove it yourself.

Am I at risk if I have personally removed or handled asbestos insulation? If removing or handling the asbestos created a lot of dust, the dust may have contained tiny asbestos fibers. You could have inhaled some of those fibers.

Exposure to asbestos puts you at risk for lung diseases; that risk may be made worse by activities such as smoking. Although some people have developed severe illnesses from short-term or limited exposures, in general the greater the exposure to asbestos the greater the chance of developing health effects. If you are concerned that you may have been exposed to asbestos, you may consider visiting a physician experienced in identifying and treating asbestos exposure, such as a physician specializing in occupational and environmental medicine.

I have insulation in my attic. Will it harm me to go into the attic?

If the insulation does not contain asbestos, then there is no threat of harm from asbestos-related illnesses from exposure to it. However, many types of insulation can be irritating to the skin, nose, throat, and lungs.

Even if it contains asbestos, the insulation may not be a problem if it is in good condition. For asbestos to present a problem for the homeowner, it must be disturbed so that tiny fibers are released into the air and inhaled or ingested.

Just going into the attic without disturbing a lot of dust will probably not harm you.

Should I leave asbestos-containing insulation in my attic?

If the asbestos insulation is not fraying or breaking down and producing a lot of dust (containing free fibers), then it can remain. Asbestos insulation in good condition, left undisturbed, will not harm you.

If the insulation is producing dust, it would be wise to cover it with sheets of plastic and/or plywood. Plastic alone would be okay if you don't go into the attic often; the plywood, with its seams caulked, installed over the plastic would be better if you spend significant time there.

In the long term, it would be better for a professional to replace old asbestos insulation with more modern insulation. However, containment of the asbestos with properly installed plastic and wood is an option to delay that expense.

Some states may require that owners selling their houses inform the buyers of the asbestos in the house.

I have insulation that's quite old (more than 15 years). Is it possible that the asbestos in it could still pose a health problem?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral fiber and it is unlikely to break down over time under the kinds of conditions found in a home. If there was asbestos in the insulation when it was installed, it is still there.

In fact, as the insulation gets older, it may deteriorate through normal wear and tear into the kind of tiny airborne fibers that are of concern. If this is the case, you may want to consider containment options. If the insulation is producing dust, it would be wise to cover it with sheets of plastic and/or plywood. Plastic alone would be okay if you don't go into the attic often; the plywood, with its seams caulked, installed over the plastic would be better if you spend significant time there. In the long term, it would be better for a professional to replace old asbestos insulation with more modern insulation. However, containment of the asbestos with properly installed plastic and wood is an option to delay that expense.

If you think that fibers from your attic may be getting into your living space, then you may want to consult an asbestos expert to have it evaluated and perhaps removed. You may be able to find a qualified asbestos removal contractor by contacting a regional or state industrial or homeowners contractors association or your local, county or state public health office.

I have handled rolls of insulation for years. Am I at risk for exposure?

Not all insulation is made from asbestos; insulation may be made out of fiberglass or other materials. You should first determine whether the insulation that you handled contains asbestos.

Handling rolls of insulation containing asbestos increases the chance that you have been exposed to harmful fibers.

Whether that exposure is likely to cause harmful health effects is unique to each individual. Each

person's response to exposure differs and may be based upon genetic makeup and certain lifestyle activities, particularly smoking.

If you suspect that you have been exposed to asbestos fibers, especially if you think the exposure was long-term, you should consult a physician experienced in occupational and environmental medicine.

For more information about Asbestos, go to [ATSDR ToxFAQsTM](#).

For other information, contact Kathy Skipper, John Florence, or Mike Grouitt, ATSDR Office of Policy and External Affairs, at (404) 498-0070, or via e-mail at the [ATSDR Press Office](#) at ATSDRPress@cdc.gov.

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