

Asthma and Your Work

What is Asthma?

Asthma is a debilitating chronic respiratory disease which requires frequent doctors' consultations, medications and often hospital admissions. The symptoms of asthma are difficulty in breathing, noisy breathing and cough.

Can my work and/or working environment affect my asthmatic condition?

It has been proven that some workplace factors could initiate or aggravate your asthma.

What are the different types of asthma found in the workplace?

- **Work-aggravated Asthma** – Pre-existing asthma that is aggravated by your work or physical stimuli in your workplace
- **Occupational Asthma** - Asthma which is only due to the conditions in working environment, but not to stimuli outside the workplace

What are the high risk occupations?

Some jobs are more likely to cause asthma because of the triggers in their working environment. Example of such high risk jobs includes:

Occupation	Trigger Factors
Baking and pastry cooks	Flour, food additives
Car repairs and panel beating	Epoxy resins and organic solvents
Electronics	Solder fumes
Electroplating	Heavy metal fumes
Fire fighting	Smoke and combustion products
Farming	Animal fur, feathers and grain dusts
Foam manufactures	Polyurethane
Hairdressing	Dyes, perfumes and sprays
Health care workers	Latex, glutaraldehyde, pharmaceutical products
Metal refining	Acids, chlorines, heavy metal salts
Oil refining	Hydrocarbon mists
Painting and decorating	Paints additives and solvents
Woodworking	Wood dusts
Working with animals	Animal fur and animal urine

How can we prevent workplace asthma?

- Always follow proper and safe work practices
- If indicated, use personal protective equipments such as masks and respirators where necessary
- Install exhaust fans and air filtering units
- Maintain good indoor air quality

Do keep in mind that if your asthma worsens, your doctor may recommend you to be transferred to another section, and in severe cases, even recommend you to leave the organisation in order to protect your health

Is your workplace asthma friendly?

Go through the following checklist to assess if your workplace is asthma friendly:

- Is your workplace smoke free?
- Are dusts and other chemical agents adequately controlled and their levels monitored?
- Does your work area have adequate ventilation systems?
- Are ventilation systems well maintained?
- Are control systems regularly monitored and maintained?
- Are you and your colleagues provided with the correct type of respiratory masks?
- Are you and your colleagues subjected to regular medical surveillance including respiratory functions?

If “YES” to all the above, your workplace is asthma friendly; if not, talk to your supervisor and seek advice from your doctor.

Points to Remember!!

If your asthma symptoms are worse during the working week, you may have occupational or work-aggravated asthma; discuss with your doctor today on how to manage your asthma effectively.



OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

ASTHMA AND YOUR WORK

