



ASTHMA AT WORK

Hairdressers can get it. Cleaners can get it. Even bakery workers can get it. What do these workers all have in common? They are all at risk of getting work-related asthma, the most common lung disease on the job.

Many things can cause work-related asthma, including dust, mould, fumes and chemicals. There are two kinds of work-related asthma: **occupational asthma** and **work-exacerbated asthma**.

Some people develop asthma for the first time because of something at their workplace (for example, paint, detergent or latex). They didn't have asthma when they started the job, but something at work gave them asthma. **If you have asthma that developed because of something at work, you've got occupational asthma.**

In some cases, occupational asthma develops slowly, over many months or years. In other cases (for example, if there's a chemical spill), you can get occupational asthma quickly, in a few days.

Some people who already have asthma find that something at work makes their symptoms worse, like pet dander, exercise or extreme temperatures. **If your asthma is made worse by something at work, you have work-exacerbated asthma (also known as work-aggravated asthma).**

People may notice work-exacerbated asthma their first day on the job. It doesn't need time to develop.

How do you know if you have work-related asthma?

If you have work-related asthma, you may have the usual asthma symptoms of:

- coughing
- wheezing
- feeling short of breath
- chest tightness

You may also have:

- runny or itchy nose
- stuffed up nose
- red, irritated or swollen eyes

To find out if these symptoms are caused by something at work, watch for these red flags:

- Do your asthma symptoms get worse at work or after work hours during the week?
- Do your asthma symptoms keep you up at night?
- Do your asthma symptoms go away when you are away from work for several days or on holidays?
- Did your asthma symptoms start after working with a new substance (for example, a new kind of paint or flour)?
- Do your co-workers have similar symptoms?

If you have asthma symptoms or if you answered yes to any of these questions, talk to your doctor.



Who gets work-related asthma?

Anyone can get work-related asthma, but some jobs put workers at higher risk. For example, jobs where workers handle or breathe in things that are known to cause asthma. There are hundreds of substances that have been proven to cause asthma on the job. To learn more, visit www.lung.ca/workasthma.

How common is work-related asthma?

It's estimated that 25% of working adults with asthma have symptoms that are work-related. Doctors say that up to 10-15% of new asthma cases in adults can be blamed on something in their patients' workplace.

Could it be work-related asthma?

If you think you may have work-related asthma, here's what you should do:

- 1 See your doctor.** Your doctor will examine you, test your breathing, and ask you questions about your symptoms and how they developed. After examining and testing you, the doctor can diagnose your breathing problem and tell you if it's caused by your work.
- 2 Get treatment.** Your doctor can recommend treatment to manage your symptoms. Follow your doctor's advice to protect yourself from getting sicker.

Visit www.lung.ca/workasthma or call us at 1-888-566-5864.



Jobs at high risk for work-related asthma include:

- Auto body shop and spray painters
- Farmers and grain workers
- Bakers
- Dental hygienists
- Janitors and cleaning staff
- Veterinarians and animal handlers
- Woodworkers
- Health-care professionals
- Seafood processors
- Hairdressers and manicurists
- Welders
- Teachers
- Waiters and bar staff

For a complete list, visit: www.lung.ca/workasthma