

Asbestos

Asbestos - In the Home

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When is asbestos a hazard?

Asbestos is a hazard to health when the fibres are disturbed and become airborne. As such, asbestos is a health risk **only when fibres are present in the air and then people breathe them into the lungs**. Fibres can be released into the air when asbestos-containing products break down. This release can happen through deterioration or when the material is cut or disturbed.

What is covered in this document?

This document is part of a series of documents on asbestos:

- [Asbestos - What is...](#)
- [Asbestos - Health Effects](#)
- [Asbestos - Control Strategies for Workplaces](#)
- **Asbestos - In the Home**

What should I do if I think there is asbestos in my house?

If asbestos is suspected or found, hire a qualified asbestos removal specialist to get rid of it before beginning any renovations or work. Do not disturb asbestos materials yourself. Handling possible asbestos-containing material increases the risk to your health and your family's health. Check with your provincial and territorial workplace safety authorities to find out the qualifications or certifications needed in your area.

If you have [vermiculite-based insulation](#) in your attic, it may contain asbestos. To avoid exposure to asbestos fibres, do not disturb vermiculite-based attic insulation in any way or attempt to remove it yourself. Make sure:

- do not use the attic for storage
- do not allow children in the attic
- only professionals who are trained to handle asbestos should do so
- apply caulking to seal openings or gaps, such as the attic entry, baseboards, light fixtures, electrical outlets, or window and door frames
- repair any damage to walls and ceilings

Where can asbestos be found in the home?

You cannot tell if a product contains asbestos just by looking at it. The only way to tell is to have it tested by a laboratory.

Be aware of where asbestos was used, including:

- Building materials (roofing shingles, roof sealants, ceiling and floor tiles, paper products and felts, house siding, and asbestos-containing cement and plaster products).
- Friction materials (automobile clutch pads, brake linings, pads and shoes, and transmission parts).
- Heat, electrical, and sound insulation or wrappings.
- Insulation for hot and cold areas.

Is asbestos always a hazard?

No, not always. Products in good condition (not deteriorating, etc.) may not be releasing fibres. If a material shows signs of damage such as tears, cracks or water damage, talk to a professional consultant. When examining the product, don't touch it as you may unintentionally release fibres into the air.

Asbestos fibres can be released into the air in homes when:

- Disturbing loose-fill vermiculite insulation, which may contain asbestos.
 - Removing deteriorating roofing shingles and siding containing asbestos, or tampering with roofing felt that contains asbestos.
 - Ripping away old asbestos insulation from around a hot water tank.
 - Sanding or scraping vinyl asbestos floor tiles.
 - Breaking apart acoustical ceiling tiles containing asbestos.
 - Sanding plaster containing asbestos, or sanding or disturbing acoustical plaster that gives ceilings and walls a soft, textured look.
 - Sanding or scraping older water-based asbestos coatings such as roofing compounds, spackling, sealants, paint, putty, caulking or drywall.
 - Sawing, drilling or smoothing rough edges of new or old asbestos materials.
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Can I remove asbestos from my home myself?

No, you should not. Asbestos fibres can easily become airborne, creating a risk of serious illness if proper precautions are not taken.

If you suspect there might be asbestos-containing material, before renovations can take place, the product or material must be tested. If asbestos is present, proper procedures must be used before the material can be disturbed (removed or cut).

In many areas, there are strict regulations that define the procedures that must be used when working with different types of asbestos. Even if the work is to be done outdoors, these requirements must be followed.

For example, in Ontario, any worker who is involved in an asbestos abatement project must have received proper training. If the worker is involved in a [type 3 operation](#), the worker must have received training that is approved by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Can I paint or encapsulate the asbestos myself?

It is not recommended that asbestos products be painted. Painting over the insulation (e.g., when wrapped around pipes) is not a method of encapsulation. The paint may seal the product somewhat, but it may not prevent the insulation from becoming friable (broken into smaller pieces).

In addition, the 'act' of painting or trying to encapsulate asbestos by other methods may loosen asbestos fibres, which can then become airborne.

If there is concern about the asbestos product, it is recommended that it be removed safely or encapsulated by a professional contractor.

What should I do?

The best step is to hire a professional contractor or consultant familiar with asbestos removal. When hiring, confirm that they are qualified and have insurance that covers the type of asbestos work they will be completing.

The person you hire should discuss the specific steps that must be taken to prepare the work area to make sure that:

- The dust is controlled.
- The right personal protective clothing and equipment are used.
- There is an appropriate clean-up of the work area and waste removal.

Does CCOHS offer asbestos contracting or removal services?

No. CCOHS does not offer any services related to asbestos testing, identification or removal.

CCOHS does not maintain or have a list of asbestos removal contractors. Please search the Internet to find a contractor in your area. When hiring, confirm they are qualified and have insurance that covers the type of asbestos work they will be completing.

Where can I get more information?

More information is available from:

- Health Canada - [Asbestos and your health](#)
- WorkSafe BC - [A home renovation shouldn't actually take your breath away](#)

(*We have mentioned these organizations as a means of providing a potentially useful referral. You should contact the organization(s) directly for more information about their services. Please note that mention of these organizations does not represent a recommendation or endorsement by CCOHS of these organizations over others of which you may be aware.)

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