

# Could you have...



## WORK-RELATED ASTHMA?



Web [http: www.nmhealth.org/eheb/occhealth.shtml](http://www.nmhealth.org/eheb/occhealth.shtml)  
Phone: 888-878-8992

Epidemiology and Response Division  
Environmental Health Epidemiology

## What is Work-Related Asthma?

Asthma is a disease that makes breathing difficult. The airways in your lungs get narrow and a lot of mucus is produced. Adults who have never had asthma before can get asthma from breathing substances in the air at work. Others who already have asthma can have their asthma made worse from air at work. Both kinds of asthma are considered to be **work-related asthma**, also known as occupational asthma.



### Health Effects Related to Asthma

#### What are the symptoms of work-related asthma?

The symptoms include:

- Wheezing
- Cough
- Chest tightness
- Shortness of breath



Symptoms usually happen when workers breathe certain asthma-causing substances at work, or can happen after the worker has left for the day. Symptoms may get better before returning to work but

will occur at home if the worker is exposed for a long time.

#### What causes work-related asthma?

There are over 400 substances known to cause or trigger asthma in the workplace. Triggers of asthma can be different for different people. Some workplace triggers are:

- Chemicals in paints
- Cleaning products
- Animals and insects
- Dust from wood, grain, or flour
- Metal working fluids
- Latex gloves
- Welding fumes
- Solvents

**If you think your asthma may be related to your work, tell your health care provider.**

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
EPIDEMIOLOGY AND RESPONSE  
New Mexico Occupational Health Surveillance  
5301 Central Avenue, NE Suite 900  
Environmental Health Epidemiology Bureau  
Albuquerque, NM 87108

Could you have...

## WORK-RELATED ASTHMA?

### Which workers get work-related asthma?

Workers in many different occupations and industries can get work-related asthma including:

- Health care workers
- Farm workers and animal handlers
- Construction workers such as carpenters and welders
- Automobile spray painters
- Factory workers
- Teachers
- Janitors
- Bakers

### What can you do if you think you have work-related asthma?

#### Talk to your doctor

Keep a daily record of your asthma attacks. Tell your doctor when your asthma gets better or worse.

Tell your doctor about your current job and jobs that you have had in the past.

Your doctor can decide if your asthma is work-related. Tests can be done to find out if you have asthma or some other kind of lung condition. Tests may include:

- Physical exam of your chest
- Chest x-ray
- Blood tests
- Breathing (spirometry) tests

**Remind your health care provider that occupational asthma is a health condition reportable to the New Mexico Department of Health, Occupational Health Registry: More info at <http://nmhealth.org/eheb/occhealth.shtml> or call 888-878-8992.**

### For more information on asthma and work-related asthma:

- NM Department of Health asthma website <http://nmhealth.org/eheb/asthma.shtml>
- CDC Frequently asked questions about asthma <http://www.cdc.gov/asthma/faqs.htm>
- American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology <http://www.aaaai.org/>
- NHLBI Asthma Guidelines Update [http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/lung/update/asthma\\_guidelines.htm](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/lung/update/asthma_guidelines.htm)
- NM Department of Health Occupational Health Surveillance program <http://nmhealth.org/eheb/occhealth.shtml>
- NIOSH Prevention of Occupational Asthma <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/asthma/OccAsthmaPrevention.html>
- OSHA occupational asthma website <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/occupationalasthma/>
- NYDOH Occupational Asthmagens [http://www.health.state.ny.us/environmental/workplace/lung\\_disease\\_registry/toolkit/asthmagens.htm](http://www.health.state.ny.us/environmental/workplace/lung_disease_registry/toolkit/asthmagens.htm)

If your doctor tells you that you have asthma, further tests may be done to find out if it is related to your job.

#### Work with your employer

Tell your employer about your problem. They can work with you to prevent your exposure to triggers by

- Providing face masks for certain work tasks
- Making sure ventilation is working properly
- Move your work to a different work area.