

# Mesothelioma Causes - Symptoms & Treatment

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Mesothelioma cancer results from being exposed to asbestos fibers. Other diseases related to asbestos are lung cancer and asbestosis. Because of this companies using buildings that have asbestos for insulation are required by law to let people know about it and to take precautions against breathing in the fibers. Asbestos seemed like a good choice for insulation years ago because it doesn't conduct heat well and doesn't melt or burn easily. It was used in floor tiles, roofing, patching compounds such as sheet rock mud. As a dust it can be breathed into the lungs. Mesothelioma is a form of cancer that is almost always caused by exposure to asbestos.

## Information about Malignant Mesothelioma

Malignant mesothelioma is an uncommon, but no longer rare, cancer that is difficult to diagnose and poorly responsive to therapy. Malignant mesothelioma is the most serious of all asbestos-related diseases. A layer of specialized cells called mesothelial cells lines the chest cavity, abdominal cavity, and the cavity around the heart. These cells also cover the outer surface of most internal organs. The tissue formed by these cells is called mesothelium. The mesothelium helps protect the organs by producing a special lubricating fluid that allows organs to move around. For example, this fluid makes it easier for the lungs to move inside the chest during breathing. The mesothelium of the chest is called the pleura and the mesothelium of the abdomen is known as the peritoneum. The mesothelium of the pericardial cavity (the "sac-like" space around the heart) is called the pericardium. Tumors of the mesothelium can be benign (noncancerous) or malignant (cancerous). A malignant tumor of the mesothelium is called a malignant mesothelioma. Because most mesothelial tumors are cancerous, malignant mesothelioma is often simply called mesothelioma.

## Mesothelioma Cases

Mesothelioma was recognized as a tumor of the pleura, peritoneum and pericardium in the late 1700's. However it was not until much later, in 1960, that this particular type of tumor was described in more detail and even more importantly, its association with asbestos exposure was recognized. The first report linking mesothelioma to asbestos exposure was written by J.C.Wagner, and described 32 cases of workers in the "Asbestos Hills" in South Africa. Since then, the relationship between mesothelioma and asbestos exposure has been confirmed in studies around the world. The incidence of mesothelioma in the United States remains very low, with 14 cases occurring per million people per year. Despite these numbers, the noticed threefold increase in mesothelioma in males between 1970 and 1984, is directly associated with environmental and occupational exposure to asbestos, mostly in areas of asbestos product plants and shipbuilding facilities.

Mesothelioma is a formerly rare form of cancer in which malignant (cancerous) cells are found in the mesothelium, a protective sac that covers most of the body's internal organs. It principally affects the pleura (lining of the lungs) and peritoneum (surrounding the lower digestive tract). Most of the people who develop mesothelioma have worked on jobs where they inhaled asbestos particles. Working with asbestos is the major risk factor for mesothelioma. The typically long delay between first exposure to asbestos and death from mesothelioma (seldom less than 15 years, but possibly as long as 60 years) means that deaths occurring now and most of those expected to occur in the future reflect industrial conditions of the past rather than current work practices. This latency period means that the effectiveness of current controls cannot yet be assessed from the mesothelioma mortality figures. A history of asbestos exposure at work is associated with about 80 percent of all cases. However, mesothelioma has been reported in some individuals without

any known exposure to asbestos.

### **Where Mesothelioma is located in the body?**

The cancer cells are located in the chest or abdomen.

### **Mesothelioma Symptoms & Treatment**

Symptoms are shortness of breath, chest pain or swelling in the abdomen. These symptoms are not a guarantee of the disease but are important to see a doctor to find out if they represent mesothelioma. If you have worked on a job where asbestos was present these symptoms are to be taken very seriously to get early treatment. Your doctor will be able to look internally to discover whether the symptoms are representative of mesothelioma. This test is usually done in the hospital. If abnormal cells are found, a biopsy will be taken. A biopsy is a small piece of what is found so it can be studied under a microscope. If the diagnosis is mesothelioma, treatment must be given. Many components affect the survival rate of the person with the disease. As with anything, age can be a factor. Some people respond more positively to treatment. Where the disease is located has an impact on survival of it.

### **What are asbestos?**

The generic name "asbestos" belongs to a group of minerals called "asbestiform" minerals. Asbestos is a fibrous material which is mined from serpentine rock. Basically, rock was mined and crushed. When the rock was crushed, fibrous strands of asbestos were extracted from the rock. The strands were put in bags and shipped to manufacturing facilities where the asbestos was used as an ingredient in insulation and other materials. The three most commonly used forms of asbestos in product manufacturing were chrysotile, amosite and crocidolite.

Although asbestos products have not been used in construction since approximately 1975, the products in place present a clear danger to individuals involved in repair work and the demolition of structures containing asbestos products.

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