



# Asbestos

## Why am I being warned about potential exposure to asbestos?



- Asbestos is on the [Proposition 65](#) list for cancer. Exposure to asbestos can cause cancer of the lung, mesothelium (the thin membrane lining the lungs, chest, and abdominal cavity), larynx, and ovaries.
- California's Proposition 65 requires [businesses](#) to warn people before exposing them to a significant amount of a [chemical](#) listed under Proposition 65 for cancer or [reproductive toxicity](#).

## What is asbestos?

- Asbestos is a group of minerals composed of thin fibers. Products that contain asbestos may resemble white or gray cardboard, cotton, or plaster.
- Asbestos was widely used in the past because of its resistance to heat and fire, along with its strength, durability, and insulating properties. However, asbestos use in the United States has declined sharply since the 1970s, and has been banned in many industrialized countries.
- Asbestos is present in some older products that are still in use. Asbestos is also present in some products on the market, though many uses of asbestos are subject to [regulation by the US Environmental Protection Agency](#) (US EPA).



Most asbestos fibers are so small that they can only be seen under a microscope.  
Photo courtesy of the Environmental Health Laboratory, California Department of Public Health.

## What types of products may contain asbestos?

- [Building materials](#) used in older [buildings](#), especially those constructed before the 1980s. These materials include some wall and attic insulation (including older [vermiculite insulation](#)); pipe, boiler, and furnace insulation; caulking and patching compounds; vinyl floor tiles and sheet flooring; ceiling tiles and sprayed-on or 'popcorn' finishes; roof shingles; building siding; and cement pipes and products.
- [Motor vehicle parts](#) such as some clutches and brakes. However, [as of 2014](#), asbestos is not permitted at levels above 0.1% in most [brake materials](#) sold in California.
- In the past, some consumer products with vermiculite or talc, minerals that can occur together with asbestos deposits in the earth, were found to be contaminated with asbestos.

- ▶ Vermiculite is used to aerate soil and retain soil moisture. In the past, vermiculite was also used in attic insulation, gypsum wallboard, and fireproofing materials. Learn more about [vermiculite in consumer products](#), including [vermiculite in potting soil](#), and [vermiculite in insulation](#), from the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry and US EPA.
- ▶ Talc is used in some cosmetics and personal care products, such as blush and eyeshadow. Learn more about [asbestos and talc-based cosmetics](#) from the US Food and Drug Administration (US FDA).

### How does exposure to asbestos occur?

The main way you can be exposed to asbestos is by breathing in asbestos fibers that have been released into the air.

- This can happen when materials that contain asbestos are broken, crumbled, or crushed, for example, when buildings with asbestos are demolished or renovated.
- When left intact and undisturbed, asbestos in products such as tiles, insulation, and other building materials is unlikely to be released into the air.



Asbestos fibers typically pose the greatest risk when they are disturbed.

### Main ways you can be exposed to asbestos:



### How can I reduce my exposure to asbestos?

- ⊗ Do not touch, disturb, or remove anything you suspect may contain asbestos. Do not [dust, sweep, or vacuum](#) these materials. Doing so can release settled asbestos fibers into the air all over again, where you can breathe them in.
- ✓ If you plan to renovate a part of your home that was built before the 1980s and that may contain asbestos, avoid doing the work yourself. Work with a contractor who is [licensed](#) and [registered](#) to perform asbestos work in buildings.
- ✓ If you live in a rented [apartment](#) or other type of housing, report any broken or crumbled materials you suspect may contain asbestos to your landlord.
- ✓ If your brakes need to be serviced, you can avoid possible asbestos exposure by taking your vehicle to a professional mechanic.

**For more information:****General Fact Sheets and Resources**

- US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA)
  - ▶ Asbestos  
<https://www.epa.gov/asbestos>
  - ▶ Contact Us about Asbestos  
<https://www.epa.gov/asbestos/forms/contact-us-about-asbestos>
- US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)  
National Cancer Institute
  - ▶ Asbestos Exposure and Cancer Risk  
<https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/substances/asbestos/asbestos-fact-sheet>
- Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)
  - ▶ Asbestos and Your Health  
<https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/asbestos/index.html>
- California Department of Public Health (CDPH)
  - ▶ Asbestos  
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDCPHP/DEODC/EHLB/AQS/Pages/Asbestos.aspx>
- California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA)  
Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment
  - ▶ Asbestos Fact Sheet – Information on Health Risks from Exposure to Asbestos  
<https://oehha.ca.gov/air/asbestos-fact-sheet-information-health-risks-exposures-asbestos>

**Scientific Information about Asbestos**

- World Health Organization (WHO)  
International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC)
  - ▶ IARC Monographs on the Evaluation of Carcinogenic Risks to Humans, vol. 100C (2012). “Asbestos” in Arsenic, Metals, Fibres, and Dusts, pages 219-323.  
<https://publications.iarc.fr/Book-And-Report-Series/Iarc-Monographs-On-The-Identification-Of-Carcinogenic-Hazards-To-Humans/Arsenic-Metals-Fibres-And-Dusts-2012>
- US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)  
National Toxicology Program (NTP)
  - ▶ Asbestos. Report on Carcinogens, Fourteenth Edition  
<https://ntp.niehs.nih.gov/ntp/roc/content/profiles/asbestos.pdf>

**Proposition 65**

- California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA)  
Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA)
  - ▶ Proposition 65: Background  
<https://www.p65warnings.ca.gov/faq>
  - ▶ Proposition 65: The List of Chemicals  
<https://www.p65warnings.ca.gov/chemicals>
  - ▶ Proposition 65: Fact Sheets  
<https://www.p65warnings.ca.gov/fact-sheets>