If you think you might have Work-Related Asthma, you need to:

1. Contact the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) to learn more about work-related asthma.
2. Talk to your doctor about your asthma and your work.
3. Ask your doctor to report your asthma to the NJDOH.

New Jersey Law REQUIRES that physicians, advanced practice nurses, and physician assistants report individuals diagnosed with work-related asthma.

What happens when I contact the NJ DOH?

A healthcare professional will talk to you and your doctor. He or she will provide helpful information to determine the cause of your asthma.

If you agree, a NJDOH occupational health professional will contact your employer and help identify and control your exposure to the substance causing your asthma.

Your identity will never be revealed.

Questions? Concerns? Want more information? Contact us:

Work-Related Asthma Surveillance Coordinator
NJ Department of Health
Occupational Health Surveillance Unit
PO Box 369
Trenton NJ 08625-0369
Phone: (609) 984-1863
E-mail: surveillance@doh.state.nj.us

What are the symptoms of asthma?

The symptoms of asthma include:
- wheezing
- a tight feeling in the chest
- coughing
- shortness of breath
- difficulty breathing

What is Work-Related Asthma?

Work-related asthma is a disease in which the lungs react to dusts, mists, vapors, gases, or fumes that are in the workplace. These can be allergens or irritants.

The two major types of work-related asthma are:
1) New-onset asthma – a healthy worker gets symptoms for the first time while at work.
2) Work-aggravated asthma – pre-existing asthma is worse at work.

Symptoms of work-related asthma usually occur while or after a worker is exposed to a particular substance at work. However, some workers will only get symptoms many hours after leaving work.

Symptoms usually go away during weekends or vacations, and return after going back to work.

Work-related asthma is usually reversible. But permanent lung damage, or even death, can occur if exposure to the substance that causes the disease continues. In some workers, very small amounts of the substance can cause an asthma attack.

What causes Work-Related Asthma?

There are all sorts of substances in the workplace that may cause work-related asthma. Here are some examples:
- chemicals in polyurethane paints, cleaning materials, and other products
- latex rubber
- grain and flour dust
- dust (dander) from animals and insects
- molds

Who gets Work-Related Asthma?

Workers in hundreds of jobs are potentially exposed to substances in the air that may cause work-related asthma. Here are some examples of jobs in New Jersey where work-related asthma has been diagnosed:
- health care workers
- hairdressers
- janitors and housekeeping staff
- bakery workers
- animal handlers

Every breath counts!
How is Work-Related Asthma diagnosed?
Your doctor should give you a complete physical exam and look at your medical history. He or she should ask you what you do at work and what materials you work with at your job. Your doctor should also ask if your symptoms started at work or get worse at work. There are special tests that your doctor can do to help diagnose asthma that is related to your job.

How can Work-Related Asthma attacks be prevented?
If your asthma is work-related, there are steps that should be taken to make your workplace healthier. Your employer is required by Federal safety laws to promote a safe and healthy workplace. For example:

Elimination/Substitution – Your employer may be able to stop using the substance that causes your asthma attacks or find a different substance to use.

Ventilation – There are special ventilation systems that can be installed to remove substances from the air before you breathe them.

Respirators – Your employer can provide you with a respirator. A respirator can prevent you from breathing the substance that causes your asthma attacks. Wearing a respirator requires medical approval and training.

Skin Protection – You can wear the right kind of gloves and/or aprons to protect your skin when working with chemicals.

Good Housekeeping/Work Practices – Clean-up and other jobs that cause asthma attacks can be done in ways that stop the release of substances into the air.

Training – You need to know what jobs may be bad for your health and how to protect yourself.

Who can I contact for more information?
For more information about work-related asthma, use the Internet resources listed below or contact the NJDOH:

- Work-Related Asthma Surveillance Coordinator
  NJ Department of Health
  Occupational Health Surveillance Unit
  PO Box 360
  Trenton NJ 08625-0360
  Phone: (609) 826-4984
  E-mail: surveillance@doh.state.nj.us

Internet Resources:
- NJDOH Work-Related Asthma Website
  Adult asthma information
  http://www.pacnj.org/Default.htm

- Pediatric/Adult Asthma Coalition of New Jersey (PACNJ)
  Statewide clearinghouse for asthma programs and services
  http://www.pacnj.org/Default.htm

- US Environmental Protection Agency
  Asthma and indoor environments
  http://www.epa.gov/asthma/index.html

- American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology
  - Asthma and immunology
  - Patient education
  http://www.aaaai.org/conditions-and-treatments/asthma.aspx

- American Lung Association
  Adult asthma information
  http://www.lung.org/

What should I do?
- Contact the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) and ask for information about work-related asthma.
- Ask your doctor to report your asthma to the NJDOH. Help us prevent work-related asthma.