

## How Do I Know If My Asthma Is Work-Related?

- If your asthma symptoms are worse at work
- If your asthma symptoms are worse at night after work
- If your symptoms improve on days off or on vacation
- If you avoid work activities or materials because they trigger trouble breathing... then your asthma could be work-related.

## What Can I Do Now?

If you suspect you have asthma, see a doctor for an evaluation. A diagnosis of asthma is made based on the following:

- Medical and work history
- Breathing tests that show that airways are hyper-reactive (twitchy)

In the meantime, avoid triggers in your work or home environment.

Pay attention to the triggers that affect your breathing and make sure that you tell your doctor.

If you suspect that your asthma is work-related, you may be eligible for workers' compensation.

## Asthma Is Treatable

The best treatment for asthma is **avoidance** of known or suspected triggers.

**Medication** is also necessary in most cases. Your doctor will discuss treatment with you. It is important that you understand the reasoning behind each medication and take it as prescribed.

With proper treatment, asthma symptoms can be controlled. The earlier you start, the better.

## How Can I Get More Information About Occupational Asthma?

Contact: Occupational Health Surveillance Program,  
Massachusetts Department of Public Health  
at **617-624-5632**.

On-line resources:

<http://www.lungusa.org>

<http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/lung/toolkit/toolkit.htm>

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/asthma/>

<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/occupationalasthma/index.html>

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# Asthma & Construction Workers

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**1 out of 10 adults in  
Massachusetts has asthma.  
DO YOU?**

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**Massachusetts  
Department of Public Health**

**Building and Construction Trades Council  
Metropolitan District**

**Massachusetts Building Trades Council**

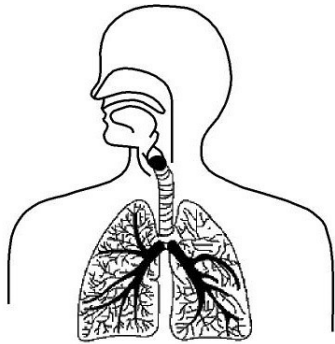
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## What Is Asthma?

Asthma is a chronic (continuing over time) disease of the lungs. The airways in the lungs become inflamed and “twitchy.” Muscles around the airways tighten (bronchospasm). Mucous glands lining the airways produce too much mucous that can plug the airways. These changes result in trouble breathing. Asthma is a serious disease. It can be life-threatening.

Asthma often goes undiagnosed. This may be particularly true for construction workers. If asthma is diagnosed, it can be treated. If it is not diagnosed, it will only get worse.



## What Are Symptoms of Asthma?

The most common symptoms are:

- Cough (particularly at night)
- Wheeze
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness

Not everyone has all of these symptoms.

## Should I Worry That I Have Asthma?

As a first step, please answer these questions.

If you run or climb stairs fast do you ever:

- cough? Yes  No   
wheeze? Yes  No   
get tight in the chest? Yes  No

Is your sleep ever broken by:

- wheeze? Yes  No   
difficulty breathing? Yes  No

Do you ever wake up in the morning (or from sleep if you are a shift worker):

- wheeze? Yes  No   
difficulty breathing? Yes  No

Do you ever wheeze if you are in a:

- smoky room? Yes  No   
very dusty place? Yes  No

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*If you answered yes to 3 or more of these 9 symptoms you may have asthma, or your medications for asthma may need adjusting. You should make an appointment with a health care provider. Bring this brochure with you.*

## What Causes or “Triggers” Asthma?

Asthma is caused or triggered by substances that irritate the airways or cause an allergic reaction in the airways.

Asthma triggers can be found at work, in the general environment, and at home.

### **Construction Work Environment**

Cement, grout, lime, dust, diesel emissions, solvents, paint, epoxy resins, surface coatings, adhesives, welding fumes and shotcrete used in tunnel work.

### **General Environment**

Air pollution caused by factory and diesel emissions, asphalt, smoke and pesticides, as well as pollen, mold and cold or hot humid air.

### **Home Environment**

Dust, pets, cockroaches, dust mites, cleaning products, some foods, mold, smoke, and wood or coal burning stoves.

These triggers can occur in various forms, including dust, fume, and mist. Even low level exposure can cause problems.