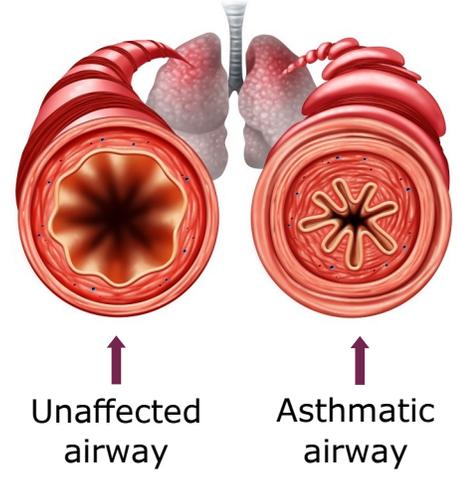


Understanding Work-Related Asthma

Asthma is a chronic condition affecting the air passages in the lungs. These passages become inflamed and narrowed at times, making it hard for people with asthma to breathe.

Work-related asthma is a type of asthma connected to exposure to substances in the workplace. It is called “work-aggravated” asthma when it occurs in someone with a history of asthma, or “occupational asthma” when it develops as a direct result of workplace exposure.



10%

When responding to a survey, 10% of Wisconsin workers with asthma reported a doctor diagnosed them specifically with work-related asthma.

49%

In the same survey, 49% of workers with asthma reported that their asthma was caused or made worse by their workplace.

Examples of jobs and exposures most often linked with work-related asthma

	pollutants	flour	enzymes	pollen	mold	metals	gums	
foams	latex	grain	seafood	medicines	adhesives			
smoke	disinfectants	dust	chemicals	mites	pesticides			firefighters
wood dust	cleaning products	animal proteins	reactive dyes	soldering fluxes				
								
veterinarians and animal handlers	woodworkers, carpenters, foresters	welders	hair and nail salon workers	spray painters	health care workers	agriculture workers		
								
bakers, grain mill, and elevator workers	pharmaceutical workers	plastics, foam, and insulation workers	foresters	construction, road, and demolition workers	bulldozer operators	housekeepers and janitors		

Reducing the Impact of Work-Related Asthma

Asthma affects both workers and their employers. Asthma causes absenteeism and reduces worker productivity. In a survey, three out of four workers with asthma felt they could not work to their full potential because of their illness. By working together, employers and workers can reduce the impact of work-related asthma.

What employers can do:

Identify the exposures in employee work areas. Use the hierarchy of controls to reduce them:

- Eliminate hazardous processes or materials from work tasks.
- Substitute by using less hazardous processes or materials. For example, choose safer cleaning products, or offer latex-free gloves.
- Install engineering controls. Examples include isolating or enclosing processes that release dust, installing local exhaust ventilation, or using water when cutting or grinding.
- Implement administrative controls such as work practices, policies, and worker training.
- Provide personal protective equipment (PPE) such as respiratory protection.

PPE should not be the sole method for protecting workers. Eliminate, substitute, and use effective engineering and administrative controls together with PPE.

Employers can also set up a medical surveillance plan to prevent asthma, or keep it from worsening. Routinely ask workers about their breathing. Periodically screen workers for symptoms of asthma. Follow up with medical testing when appropriate.

What workers can do:

Identify and avoid exposure to asthma triggers at work when possible.

Participate in your employer's asthma surveillance plan, if available.

Use well-fitted and appropriate PPE in places where asthma triggers may be found.

Report new or worsening breathing problems to your doctor and the designated person at your workplace.

Report if personal protective equipment or engineering controls malfunction to your supervisor or designated person. Engineering controls include vents, air filters, and wet-cutting or wet-grinding tools.

If you have asthma, take your medications as prescribed and regularly see your doctor.

Stay up to date on your vaccines, especially ones to prevent respiratory illnesses: the flu, COVID-19, RSV, and pneumonia.

If you smoke, talk to your doctor or employer about resources to help you quit smoking.

