

Free health assessment for stonemasons

What you need to know

WorkSafe is currently offering a free health assessment to all past and present workers in the stonemason industry to identify any crystalline silica related disease.

What is crystalline silica?

Crystalline silica (quartz) is a natural mineral. It's found in stone products such as reconstituted stone, granite and sandstone. It's also in other building materials such as concrete, bricks and mortar.

How much crystalline silica is present depends on the material. Reconstituted stone can have very high crystalline silica content – up to 95%.

Stonemasons may be exposed to crystalline silica dust

When you do things like cut, grind, drill or polish products that contain crystalline silica, it releases very fine dust. Some of the dust particles are so small you may not be able to see them.

People working in benchtop fabrication are at higher risk, because they regularly work with reconstituted stone, which has very high crystalline silica content.

What are the health risks?

Crystalline silica dust can be harmful when it's inhaled into your lungs over a long period of time at low to moderate levels, or short periods at high levels.

Silicosis occurs when crystalline silica dust scars the lungs. It's a serious and incurable disease, with symptoms including shortness of breath, coughing, fatigue and weight loss. In severe cases, silicosis can lead to death, or require a lung transplant.



**Asbestos Council
of Victoria**

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There are three types of silicosis

Chronic silicosis – This results from long-term exposure (more than 10 years) to low amounts of silica dust. The silica dust causes swelling in the lungs and chest lymph nodes and may cause people to have trouble breathing.

Accelerated silicosis – Historically very rare, occurs after exposure to larger amounts of silica over a shorter period of time (1 to 10 years). Swelling in the lungs and symptoms occur faster than in chronic silicosis.

Acute silicosis – Historically very rare, results from short-term exposure (up to 1 year) to very large amounts of silica. The lungs become very inflamed and can fill with fluid, causing severe shortness of breath and a low blood oxygen level.

Lung cancer and pulmonary massive fibrosis (PMF) can also occur.

How can I limit being exposed to silica dust?

Under the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017*, employers must control the risks associated with crystalline silica dust.

Speak to your employer about what controls are available in your workplace to eliminate or reduce your exposure to crystalline silica dust.

We urge you to read the guidance on our website that tells you more about your employer's responsibilities
www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/working-reconstituted-stone

It's important that you adhere to the safety procedures in your workplace. Recognise and report hazards and ensure that you always complete your work tasks safely.

How do I find out if I've been exposed?

If you've been exposed to crystalline silica and it is likely to have affected your health, your employer has a duty to provide you with health monitoring.

WorkSafe is currently offering a free health assessment to all past and present workers in the stonemason industry to identify any crystalline silica related disease.

Why should I get a health assessment?

In Victoria there has been an increase in silicosis claims being lodged with WorkSafe, and about 80% of these workers have worked in the stonemason industry.

Workers in the stonemason industry may be exposed to crystalline silica dust. Benchtop fabrication workers are at higher risk, because they regularly work with reconstituted stone.

Early identification of respiratory disease, including silicosis, will allow you to have treatment earlier, which can improve your health outcomes.

Am I eligible?

WorkSafe's silicosis assessment program has been developed for people working within the stonemason industry in Victoria. All past and present workers in the stonemason industry are eligible for a free health assessment.

Getting a health assessment does not mean you are putting in a WorkCover claim.

How can I get a health assessment if I'm not eligible?

If you're concerned that you or anyone you know has been exposed to crystalline silica dust, it's important that they have a health assessment.

If the exposure has occurred in the workplace, the health assessment is the responsibility of your employer and should be done by registered medical practitioners with experience in providing occupational health services.

Information about what testing should include can be found on our website www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/crystalline-silica-health-assessments.

If you are experiencing symptoms, it's important to seek immediate medical attention. Take a copy of this fact sheet with you, as it may assist your treating health practitioner.

What can I expect from a health assessment?

What is a health assessment?

The health assessment is a series of medical appointments that test for silica related illness and disease, including silicosis. These appointments may include:

- face to face interviews
- physical examinations
- chest x-ray
- lung function tests
- and possibly CT scan and blood tests

What's the process?

- Phone WorkSafe Advisory on 1800 136 089 select option 1 and then option 3 to express your interest. Once we've confirmed your eligibility, we'll send you an information pack that we encourage you to read carefully. We will also provide you with an identification number.
- If you decide to proceed, call your preferred occupational healthcare provider to make your first appointment. You will need your identification number to make the booking.
- At your first appointment, you will be asked if you would like to participate in a study being done by Monash University about silicosis, that will help us understand how to best support workers exposed to crystalline silica and improve the safety of stonemasons in the future. If you're willing to participate in the study, your occupational healthcare provider will obtain your consent on behalf of Monash. Taking part in the research study is completely your choice. You can still have a free health assessment without taking part in the study.

- Your occupational physician will arrange your referral for an x-ray and lung function tests. It's important that these are completed at the location you have been referred to, to avoid the tests having to be repeated. You will need to make your own appointments.
- Once the occupational physician receives your results, they will contact you. They may want to complete further tests and send you to a respiratory physician. If this is the case they will arrange an appointment to meet with you, give you referrals and answer any questions you may have.
- If the occupational physician wants to undertake further tests, you will have a CT scan and possibly some blood tests. These results will be sent to the respiratory physician. Your respiratory physician will meet with you to discuss your results.
- If you are diagnosed with a silica related illness or disease and you are eligible to lodge a Workers Compensation claim under the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013*, the WorkSafe health assessment team will work closely with you to support you through the process of submitting a claim.

How do I get started?

Once we've determined your eligibility, we'll provide you with an identification number and you can make an appointment with your preferred occupational healthcare provider.

WorkSafe has engaged two specialist occupational healthcare providers; Jobfit and Sonic.

To get started, phone your preferred provider and ask for a *WorkSafe silica medical*.

Jobfit 1300 6161 65

Sonic Health Plus 1300 793 004

Diagnosis and claims process

How will I get my results?

The results of your health assessment will be provided to you on completion of your health assessment. A copy will also be sent to your regular doctor.

What happens if I'm diagnosed with silicosis?

Your health is the most important thing. It's important to get treatment as soon as possible, regardless of whether you have an accepted claim.

If you are diagnosed with a silica work related illness or disease and are deemed to be a worker under the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013*, you can make a claim through WorkSafe. The WorkSafe health assessment team will work closely with you in lodging your claim and supporting you through the process.

You can find more information about the claims process on the WorkSafe website or if you're unsure phone WorkSafe Advisory.

Will my employer be notified if I make a claim through WorkSafe?

Your employer will be notified by WorkSafe if a worker's compensation claim is lodged at the end of the process. This is a normal part of the claims process.

Frequently asked questions

What if I've already had a health assessment in the last 12 months?

It's important that the health assessment you've had is in line with the recommended respiratory health assessment process. If you've had an assessment that does not meet these standards, it is recommended that you repeat the process.

Why should I undertake research as part of the health assessment?

The research project will help inform best practice into the future. By participating, you are helping to keep workers in the industry safe.

How long will the process take?

The health assessment is a comprehensive screening process that may take up to three months to complete. The length of each appointment will vary and may take up to an hour.

What is an occupational healthcare provider?

An occupational healthcare provider is a clinic that provides medical services, specialising in work related medical services. They are experts in treating and returning injured workers back to the workplace as soon as it is safe to do so.

What is an occupational physician?

An occupational physician is a doctor who specialises in work related medicine.

What is a respiratory physician?

A respiratory physician is a medical professional who specialises in diagnosing, treating and preventing conditions and diseases affecting the respiratory system (lungs).

Will my employer be advised of my appointments?

Your participation in the free health assessment program is confidential. Your employer will not receive any personal information about your health or your results from the health assessment. However, we encourage you to talk to your employer so they can help support you throughout the process.

Will I get paid for my time off work?

You will not be reimbursed by WorkSafe for your time off work. We encourage you to take the time to discuss the steps involved with your employer and make an agreement about how you will approach this process together.

Will I be reimbursed for travel?

WorkSafe may pay reasonable travel expenses you incur to attend the medical appointments. It includes reasonable costs associated with:

- private motor vehicle, including road tolls and car parking
- public transport
- in some cases, taxi travel to and from your treatment

If you would like to submit a request for travel reimbursement, phone us on 1800 136 089 and select option 1 and then option 3.

Need support during the process?

We understand that this process may make you worried or anxious. We encourage you to talk to your doctor about the options for free counselling that is available to you and your family.

We're here to help. If at any stage you need support, phone us on 1800 136 089 and select option 1 and then option 3.

More information

WorkSafe Advisory

Phone	1800 136 089
Email	healthassessment@worksafe.vic.gov.au
Website	www.worksafe.vic.gov.au

Translator and Interpreter Service

Phone	131 450
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