

20 Frequently Asked Questions About Asbestos-in-Schools

1. What is asbestos?

Asbestos is the name given to a number of naturally occurring fibrous minerals that are mined for their useful properties such as thermal insulation, chemical and thermal stability, and high tensile strength.

2. What are the health effects of asbestos exposure?

Asbestos exposure can lead to diseases such as lung cancer, asbestosis (lung scarring), and mesothelioma (cancer of the lung cavity lining). There is a long latency period for these diseases. It could be 30 years after exposure before symptoms of disease begin.

3. Is there asbestos in my child's school?

It is very possible that there is asbestos in your child's school. Asbestos can be found in various places within schools. Friable asbestos, or asbestos that can be broken by hand pressure, is of greatest concern because these fibers can most easily be released into the air and inhaled into the lungs. Examples of potentially hazardous materials include: friable asbestos-containing boiler wrap, pipe wrap insulation, ceiling tiles, and wallboard.

4. Is it dangerous to have asbestos containing material in my school?

Not necessarily. Undamaged asbestos that is properly managed in place poses little health risk to students or teachers. However, it is important that the proper school designated authorities regularly inspect asbestos containing materials to ensure they remain intact. Asbestos can pose a hazard to students, teachers, and school employees when it is disturbed and becomes airborne and therefore breathable. It has been EPA's long-standing policy that undamaged non-friable asbestos is best left undisturbed and managed in place. Removing asbestos often has the potential to create a greater health risk than leaving it undisturbed.

5. I thought asbestos was banned and then removed from schools years ago?

Asbestos products, with few exceptions, are not currently banned in the United States and are still "managed-in-place" in thousands of schools nationwide under requirements set forth by the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA). It is possible that asbestos containing materials were completely removed from your school. It is, however, more likely that asbestos is currently managed in place within your school.

**6. If my children have been in a building with asbestos, do they need to see a physician?
or
If I taught in a building with asbestos, do I need to see a physician?**

Not necessarily. Asbestos does not pose a health risk if it is managed properly. However, if you feel you may have been exposed to asbestos fibers in the air, you should consult with a physician that specializes in lung disorders or occupational exposures.

7. Is the school district required to do anything about asbestos-in-schools?

Yes. AHERA, or the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act, was passed by Congress in 1986. AHERA requires public school districts and non-profit private schools to inspect their schools for asbestos containing building material and prepare management plans which recommend the best way to reduce the hazard from any asbestos that may be present. Options include repairing damaged asbestos containing material, spraying it with sealants, enclosing it, removing it, or keeping it in good condition so that it does not release fibers. The plans must be developed by accredited management planners and approved by the State. The school authority must notify parent, teacher and employer organizations of the plans, and then the plans must be implemented. The school district must also perform periodic surveillance of asbestos containing material every 6 months in its schools. AHERA also requires accreditation of abatement designers, contractor supervisors and workers, building inspectors, and school management plan writers.

8. What is an asbestos management plan?

An asbestos management plan is required to provide documentation of the recommended asbestos response actions, the location of asbestos within the school, and any action taken to repair or remove the material. The school authority must maintain records to be included in the Asbestos Management Plan. These records include among other things:

- List of the name and address of each school building and whether the building has asbestos containing building material, and what type of asbestos-containing material.
- Date of the original school inspection
- The plan for re-inspections
- A blueprint that clearly identifies the location of asbestos-containing building material that remains in the school
- A description of any response action or preventive measures taken to reduce asbestos exposure.
- A copy of the analysis of any building material, and the name and address of any laboratory that sampled the material
- The name, address, and telephone number of the “designated person” to ensure the duties of the local education agency (LEA) are carried out
- A description of steps taken to inform workers, teachers, and students or their legal guardians about inspections, re-inspections, response actions, and periodic surveillance.

9. Do I have the right as a teacher or employee to access my school's management plan?

Yes. Parents, teachers, and school employees, or their representatives, have the right to inspect the school's asbestos management plan. The school must make the plan available within a reasonable amount of time.

10. Does this management plan have to be updated periodically?

Yes. The asbestos management plan must be updated with information collected during periodic surveillance every 6 months, re-inspections every 3 years, and every time a response action is taken within the school. Also, records of annual notifications to parents, teachers, and staff concerning the availability of the school's asbestos management plan must be included within the asbestos management plan files.

11. Does my school district have to inform me of asbestos that is in my school building?

Yes. Schools are required to notify parent-teacher organizations once a year about the availability of the school's asbestos management plan and of any asbestos abatement activity taking place within the school.

12. Was my school required to be inspected for asbestos?

Yes, unless the building architect certified in writing that no asbestos materials were used in the building's manufacture. The results of the inspections and all re-inspections, required every three years, are contained within the schools asbestos management plan. A copy of the asbestos management plan is required to be housed in the school's administrative office.

13. Does my school district/local education agency know where the asbestos in its schools is located?

They are required to know and to describe where the material is located on a blue-print diagram of the school building(s).

14. Who is responsible for overseeing the management of asbestos in a school building?

The school district/local education agency must nominate a "designated person" to perform and delegate, if necessary, the management of asbestos in a school building.

15. How can we have the air tested in my school?

AHERA only requires testing following an asbestos repair or removal activity to determine whether the activity has been properly completed. This is done by measuring the amount of asbestos in the air where the repair or removal activity has taken place. However, the educational authority, e.g., the school district, may hire a qualified consultant to test its air at any time.

16. I have seen the janitor machine-cleaning the floor tile in our school. Should I be worried that these machines will degrade the tiles and create a hazard?

Machine-cleaning of floor tile can be part of a good maintenance program for asbestos-containing floor tiles, as long as the machine is operated properly and the tiles are not in poor condition. EPA has issued special guidance on the proper maintenance of asbestos-containing floor tiles, the guidance is available from the TSCA Hotline at (202) 554-1404. Undamaged, well maintained floor tiles present little risk to students, teachers, and school staff.

17. Who is responsible for enforcing the asbestos-in-schools regulations?

EPA is the primary governmental agency responsible for enforcing the regulations promulgated under AHERA. However, if your State has been issued a wavier, the State agency is responsible for enforcing the requirements. These states are: Connecticut, Colorado, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maine, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Texas, and Utah.

18. Who can I call to report a suspected asbestos violation?

You can report violations by contacting your EPA regional asbestos coordinator listed at <http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/regioncontact.html>, or by calling the Asbestos Ombudsman at: 1-800-368-5888

19. What is EPA doing now about asbestos-in-schools?

EPA will provide local education agencies and parents and teachers with information about the AHERA asbestos-in-schools requirements. A new website has been launched, documents have been updated, and a partnership developed with the National Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), the National Education Association (NEA), and the Department of Education.

20. Where can I obtain more information about the asbestos-in-schools regulations?

You can visit our website at http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/asbestos_in_schools.html or call the TSCA Hotline at: 202-554-1404.