

Respiratory health surveillance for mineral mine and quarry workers

WORKER INFORMATION BOOKLET

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Protecting Queensland's mineral mine and quarry workers

Mine and quarry workers can be exposed to a range of respiratory hazards, such as mineral dust from development, production and processing as well as welding fumes and diesel engine exhaust emissions.

Occupational exposure to harmful levels of respiratory hazards can lead to a range of lung diseases; these include forms of pneumoconiosis (for example silicosis), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and lung cancer.

Lung damage is irreversible, however if the damage is detected early, the progress to more severe stages of disease may be prevented or slowed.

About this booklet

This booklet provides information to Queensland mineral mine and quarry workers about respiratory health surveillance.

Respiratory health surveillance is the regular monitoring or testing of a person's respiratory system to check for damage to the lungs, including changes in lung function, because of exposure to respiratory hazards at work.

Undertaking respiratory health surveillance does not remove the requirement to implement and constantly review control measures to reduce exposure to respiratory hazards.

This booklet should be read alongside the following Resources Safety & Health Queensland (RSHQ) companion booklets:

- *Mine dust lung disease* – for detailed information about the types of mine dust lung disease and how they affect your lungs.
- *Airborne dust exposure in mines and quarries* – information about controls to protect from dust exposure.
- *Health assessment information for coal mine workers* – explanation of the health assessment process under the Coal Mine Workers' Health Scheme.

The key to managing mine dust lung disease is early detection, which is why regular health surveillance is important to preserving respiratory health.



What respiratory health surveillance am I entitled to?

Under the Mining and Quarrying Safety and Health Regulation 2017 (the Regulation), the site senior executive must ensure respiratory health surveillance is carried out for each person who becomes, is or stops being a worker at a mine or quarry.

Respiratory health surveillance is required:

- when joining the industry and before you start working at a mine or quarry
- at least once every five years
- when permanently leaving the industry at your request.

Employers must pay for your respiratory health surveillance and any reasonable associated travel expenses.

When respiratory health surveillance may not apply?

The default requirement of the Regulation is that respiratory health surveillance is required for all workers.

However, the site senior executive may determine that respiratory health surveillance is not required if your exposure to respiratory hazards is so minimal, that it can be effectively managed without respiratory health surveillance.

The site senior executive can only make this decision through a risk assessment that considers current and previous exposure.

What can I expect from my respiratory health surveillance?

How it works

A doctor will undertake, or supervise, the required examinations. The Regulation refers to this doctor as an ‘Appropriate Doctor’ who is appropriately qualified and has demonstrated knowledge of the risks associated with activities performed by workers.

RSHQ has an online register of doctors qualified to supervise examinations.

The medical examinations for respiratory health surveillance must include:

- *chest examination*—this is a physical examination of the chest and includes listening to your lungs
- *chest X-ray*—dual-read to the International Labour Organization (ILO) International Classification of Radiographs of Pneumoconioses
- *spirometry test*—this is a standard test used to detect conditions that affect lung function. Workers will be required to breathe forcefully into a machine called a spirometer. The doctor will compare the results with previous spirometry results if available.



The ILO classification provides a rigorous process for reporting on the presence of an abnormality and, if present, describing its features.

The X-ray is sent to specially trained readers who evaluate the X-ray and provide a determination of the presence of any abnormality.

Based upon the results of the examinations, the Appropriate Doctor will then apply the clinical pathway guideline. The guideline documents the recommended process for follow-up investigation and referral to medical specialists for workers with abnormal results on the screening tests. Specialist tests usually include a high-resolution computed tomography scan, laboratory lung function tests and referral to a respiratory physician.

Your employer must pay for these follow-up specialist tests, including reasonable travel expenses.

Outcome of the health surveillance

When the respiratory health surveillance is complete, the Appropriate Doctor will provide you with a copy and explanation of the health surveillance report. This report does not include any records from the medical examinations and provides the doctor's findings about your respiratory health and any remedial action that may be required.

The Appropriate Doctor also provides a copy of the report to the site senior executive.

Medical records

Your medical records obtained through the respiratory health surveillance must be kept by the Appropriate Doctor.

Level of service

Medical examinations are to be completed by an appropriately qualified medical provider.

Mine and quarry operators can use doctors and medical providers who have registered with RSHQ, having demonstrated they are qualified, experienced and meet relevant standards.

This register is available online and assists in ensuring appropriate providers are used.

Only an Appropriate Doctor can complete and sign the health surveillance report.



What if I'm planning to retire soon?

Retirement examinations

Workers permanently retiring from the mining or quarrying industry can request a respiratory health surveillance examination from their employer.

Any mine or quarry worker who is permanently leaving the industry and has worked in the mining or quarrying industry for at least three years has an opportunity to voluntarily undergo a retirement examination (consisting of spirometry and chest X-ray examinations).

Employers must organise and pay for a respiratory health surveillance, including reasonable travel expenses, for any eligible mine or quarry worker who requests one.

Examination process

Workers can ask for a respiratory health surveillance conducted by an Appropriate Doctor within a six-month period, which starts three months before they permanently stop working in the industry.

The worker will not be eligible for a retirement examination if they have undergone a respiratory health surveillance within the previous five years.

Retired and former workers

Workers who have permanently stopped working in the industry are eligible for respiratory health surveillance consisting of spirometry and chest X-ray examinations. Any follow-up investigations of abnormal results are also provided.

Former workers can qualify for a free respiratory health surveillance if all of the following apply:

- worked for at least three years in the mining or quarrying industry
- have now permanently stopped being a mine or quarry worker
- at least five years since the last respiratory health surveillance.

(Note: a doctor can recommend earlier respiratory health surveillance).

If you qualify, RSHQ will arrange and pay for your respiratory health surveillance including reasonable travel and accommodation costs.

To apply, contact the Mine Dust Health Support Service on **1300 445 715** or email **info@minedusthealthsupport.com**.

What if I'm diagnosed?

Workers diagnosed with any lung disease should avoid additional exposure to respiratory hazards especially mine dust, and have their respiratory health monitored on an ongoing basis by a specialist physician.

It is important to note that with early detection and appropriate management, some mine dust lung diseases are not life-threatening and workers may live a normal life.

You should discuss the management of your ongoing exposure with your workplace and the Appropriate Doctor. Your General Practitioner can also guide you on ongoing health care. The Mine Dust Health Support Service can provide free advice on accessing support.

Mine Dust Health Support Service



Current or former Queensland mine and quarry workers can contact the Mine Dust Health Support Service. The service provides confidential support to help workers understand:

- their rights
- the screening and diagnosis process
- how to access ongoing support.

If a worker develops a mine dust lung disease because of their work in Queensland, they may be entitled to workers' compensation.

Workers' compensation

If a worker develops a mine dust lung disease as a result of their employment, they may be entitled to workers' compensation.

Entitlements can include:

- weekly compensation for lost wages
- medical expenses
- counselling and pulmonary rehabilitation services
- travelling expenses
- lump sum compensation (depending on your degree of permanent impairment)
- additional lump sum compensation for those diagnosed with pneumoconiosis.

Coal mine, mineral mine, and quarry workers diagnosed with any mine dust lung disease can submit a claim for compensation to WorkCover Queensland or the relevant self-insured employer.

Learn more about making a workers' compensation claim and the support available for workplace injuries at **www.worksafe.qld.gov.au** and contact the Mine Dust Health Support Service.

More information

To keep up to date with the latest advice on respiratory health surveillance and other mine safety and health information, visit the RSHQ website at www.rshq.qld.gov.au.

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