

Health assessment information for coal mine workers

WORKER INFORMATION BOOKLET

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Resources Safety & Health
Queensland

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Protecting Queensland's coal mine workers

The Coal Mine Workers' Health Scheme (the Scheme) protects the health of Queensland coal mine workers by ensuring they undergo compulsory health assessments. Coal mine workers can be exposed to a range of hazards, including 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 coal workers' pneumoconiosis and silicosis), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and lung cancer.

Lung damage is irreversible, however, if the lung 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 coal mine workers about health assessments under the Scheme, with a focus on its respiratory component.

The respiratory component of the Scheme includes 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 examinations 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.
- *Respiratory health surveillance for mineral mine and quarry workers* – explanation of the respiratory health surveillance process for mineral mine and quarry workers.

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



What health assessments am I entitled to?

Under the Coal Mining Safety and Health Regulation 2017, employers must ensure a health assessment is carried out for each person who is to be employed, or is employed, as a coal mine worker for a task other than a 'low-risk' task.

Health assessments are required:

- before you start work as a coal mine worker and when you change employer
- periodically, as required by the employer's Appointed Medical Adviser, but at least once every five years
- if the employer's Appointed Medical Adviser decides it is necessary.

Employers must arrange and pay for your health assessments and a copy of the report.

What can I expect from my health assessment?

How it works:

Health assessments are completed by your employer's Appointed Medical Adviser using the RSHQ approved health assessment form. Doctors who are an Examining Medical Officer can undertake health assessments and exit examinations, provided they are under the supervision of an Appointed Medical Adviser.

This form has four sections:

Section 1 is completed by your employer

It includes information about:

- the Appointed Medical Adviser
- them as your employer
- your position
- similar exposure groups
- workplace hazards and exposure risks.

Section 2 is completed by you

It documents your personal details, as well as work and medical history. This information allows the Examining Medical Officer to understand your exposure to hazards as well as any pre-existing conditions such as asthma.



Section 3 is completed by the Examining Medical Officer

It details clinical findings of the examinations. This includes results from the examinations of your respiratory system.

Section 4 is completed and signed by the Appointed Medical Adviser

The health assessment report details:

- fitness for duty
- any work restrictions
- any subsequent assessment required.

Only this section of the health assessment is forwarded to your employer.

Outcome of the health assessment

When the health assessment is complete, the Appointed Medical Adviser sends:

- the completed health assessment form and all medical reports to RSHQ
- a copy of section 4 of the health assessment report to you and your employer.

If your employer requires an explanation of a health assessment report (section 4 of the form) from the Appointed Medical Adviser, they must obtain your agreement and ensure that you are present.

Medical records

Copies of your past health assessments can be obtained from either the Appointed Medical Adviser or RSHQ (copies can usually be provided within five days).

For assistance, please call RSHQ on **(07) 3818 5420**.

Level of service

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

Employers must use doctors and medical providers who are approved by RSHQ. These providers meet specific criteria for suitability, qualifications and experience. This register of approved providers is available online and aims to ensure appropriate providers are used.

Only the Appointed Medical Adviser can complete and sign the health assessment or exit examination report.



Respiratory health screening

Your health assessment may include medical examinations to test your respiratory system. The examinations will 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
- *lung function test (spirometry)* – 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.

Regular monitoring of your respiratory system helps to identify any changes in your lung function because of exposure to respiratory hazards at work.



Your chest X-ray is sent to specially trained readers who determine the presence of any abnormality.

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

What if I'm planning to retire soon?

Exit examinations

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

Employers must organise and pay for an exit examination for any eligible worker who requests one.

Examination process

You can ask for an exit examination conducted by the Appointed Medical Adviser within a six-month period, which starts three months before you permanently stop working. You will not be eligible for an exit examination if you have undergone a health assessment that has included a lung function test and chest X-ray within the last three years.

The exit examination is conducted by the Appointed Medical Adviser using the RSHQ exit examination form.

The process for exit examinations is similar to the respiratory health screening set out on page 8.



Retired and former workers

Workers who have permanently stopped working in the industry are eligible for an assessment 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 examination if all of the following apply:

- worked for at least three years in the industry
- have now permanently stopped being a coal mine worker
- at least five years since the last respiratory health examination.

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

If you qualify, RSHQ will arrange and pay for your respiratory health examination 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 with lung disease?

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, mine dust lung diseases are unlikely to be life-threatening and workers can live a normal life.

You should discuss the management of your ongoing exposure with your workplace and the Appointed Medical Adviser. Your general practitioner can also guide you with ongoing health care. The Mine Dust Health Support Service can provide free advice on accessing support.



Mine Dust Health Support Service

**MINE DUST
HEALTH
SUPPORT SERVICE**

1300 445 715

info@minedusthealthsupport.com

Current or former Queensland coal mine workers, their families and representatives, 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 you develop a mine dust lung disease as a result of your employment, you 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 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.

Keep up to date and stay informed – follow RSHQ social media channels:



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