

Asbestos in the home

 health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/environmental-health/hazardous-substances/asbestos/asbestos-home

How to find out if you have asbestos in your home.

If you think you might have asbestos in your home contact a health protection officer at your local [district health board](#). They will advise you.

On this page:

About asbestos in the home

Generally, asbestos-containing materials that are in good condition will not release asbestos fibres. There is no danger unless fibres are released and inhaled into lungs. If you are not living in a home that contains asbestos, your exposure to asbestos is unlikely to present a high level of risk.

People can be exposed to higher levels of airborne asbestos inside their homes than levels in outdoor air, usually as a result of cutting or drilling through asbestos-cement materials or sanding down asbestos-containing surfaces, linoleum or tiles during home maintenance, renovating, repair and remodelling. Fibres are released when physical actions (deliberate or accidental) disturb the surface.

Exposure levels indoors depend on the type of asbestos and its condition. Constant exposure to crumbly or powdery (friable), damaged, exposed or poorly maintained asbestos materials may increase the health risk.

People may be exposed to asbestos from a secondary source, for example, workers' families may inhale asbestos fibres released by clothes that have been in contact with asbestos-containing material. People who live or work near asbestos-related activities may also inhale asbestos fibres that have been released into the air by the activities.

The number of fibres that are released depends on:

- the percentage of asbestos in the material
- the way it is handled, used or worked on
- how tightly the fibres are bound
- the degree of damage or wear.

Examples of asbestos in homes

1. Some roofing and siding shingles are made of asbestos cement.
2. Houses built between 1930 and 1950 may have asbestos as insulation.

3. Asbestos may be present in textured paint and in patching compounds on wall and ceiling joints.
4. Artificial ashes and embers sold for use in old gas-fired fireplaces may contain asbestos.
5. Older products such as stove-top pads may have some asbestos compounds.
6. Walls and floors around wood-burning stoves may be protected with asbestos paper, millboard, or cement sheets.
7. Asbestos is found in some vinyl floor tiles and linoleum, and as backing on vinyl sheet flooring and adhesives.
8. Hot water and steam pipes in older houses may be coated with an asbestos material or covered with an asbestos blanket or tape.
9. Oil and coal furnaces, wood burners and door gaskets may have asbestos insulation.
10. The soil around your home may have asbestos in it from inappropriate removal or storage, or from deteriorating roof or wall cladding (or other sources.)



Residential risk assessment

The table below outlines the risk of asbestos exposure based on the age of a home and the presence of asbestos-containing materials in the home structure. The materials should be assumed to be asbestos-containing materials if there is uncertainty.

Source: Bardsley A. 2015. Asbestos Exposure in New Zealand: Review of the scientific evidence of non-occupational risks.

Table 1: Residential risk assessment based on age of home, presence of asbestos-containing materials and activities that could increase or decrease risk to people

Building age	Possible asbestos-containing materials present	Status of asbestos-containing materials if present	Activities impacting asbestos-containing materials and exposure	Risk level
Pre-1940 unrenovated	None likely			None or negligible risk
Pre-1940 renovations performed 1950-1965	Exterior – corrugated cement roofs, Fibreite or Handipare cladding, Fibreite eaves	Cracks, chips or breaks in roofing or exterior cement sheathing (walls and eaves)	Materials used during removal, not sanded or drilled. Off materials sealed/wrapped	Extremely low risk
		Materials undamaged and well-maintained (sealed and painted)	Present when damaged materials were sanded or drilled	Possible short-term exposure – very low risk
	Interior – textured ceiling, wall linings, vinyl flooring	Decorative ceiling crumbling or removed, vinyl flooring sanded or drilled	Present during removal, but clean-up thorough	Possible short-term exposure – very low risk
		Materials intact	Home furnishings contaminated with dust, not cleaned or removed	Low risk but possible ongoing low-level exposure*
1940-1990	Exterior – corrugated cement roofs, Fibreite or Handipare cladding, Fibreite eaves	Cracks, chips or breaks in roofing or exterior cement sheathing (walls and eaves)	Materials used during removal, not sanded or drilled. Off materials sealed/wrapped	Extremely low risk
		Materials undamaged and well-maintained (sealed and painted)	Present when damaged materials were sanded or drilled	Possible short-term exposure – very low risk
	Interior – textured ceiling, wall linings, vinyl flooring	Decorative ceiling crumbling or removed, vinyl flooring sanded or drilled	Present during removal but clean-up thorough	Possible short-term exposure – very low risk
		Materials intact	Home furnishings contaminated with dust, not cleaned or removed	Low risk but possible ongoing low-level exposure*
Post-1990	None likely			None or negligible risk

* = possible presence of a hazard but probable low risk, □ = minimised risk, ■ = ongoing presence of the hazard and higher risk. * Risk depends on the amount of asbestos-containing materials and extent of disturbance/work carried out. Although the risk is low in absolute terms, it will increase with time if steps are not taken to remove the asbestos from their work has been completed.

Residential risk assessment.
Click image to enlarge.

How to tell if material around your home contains asbestos

A sample tested in an approved analytical laboratory is the most certain way to find out if a material contains asbestos.

If you need to get a sample tested, contact a health protection officer at the public health unit of your local district health board. They will tell you what to do.

Do not take a sample without consulting them first.