

Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis (Black Lung)



Health Hazard Information Card HH-22

Coal workers' pneumoconiosis (black lung) continues to occur among coal miners. Preventing the disease requires the commitment of both miners and mine operators to ensure exposures to harmful levels of coal mine dust are limited.

» **What is black lung?**

Black lung is a job-related disease caused by continued exposure to excessive amounts of respirable coal mine dust. This dust becomes imbedded in the lungs, causing them to harden, making breathing very difficult.

Silicosis is another job-related lung disease included in black lung. Miners develop silicosis when they are overexposed to dust containing silica. Respirable particles of silica embed in the lungs causing scar tissue to form, reducing the lung's ability to extract oxygen from the air.

» **What are the symptoms of black lung?**

In the early stage of the illness, there may be no immediate symptoms. However, the latter stages of the disease, known as progressive massive fibrosis or PMF, will cause shortness of breath, coughing and pain during breathing. PMF may result in permanent disability and early death.

» **How can I find out if I have black lung?**

Black lung can be detected by X-ray and pulmonary function tests. Every operator of an underground coal mine is required to have an X-ray plan approved by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). At intervals not to exceed five years, X-rays must

be offered to employees at no cost. Results must be kept confidential.

There is no requirement for X-rays to be offered to surface coal miners by mine operators. Surface coal miners should notify their doctor that they may be exposed to coal mine dust which may contain silica, so that appropriate tests may be performed.

» **What happens if NIOSH discovers black lung on my X-ray?**

If x-ray shows that you have black lung, you will be notified by MSHA of the results, and of the right to work in a low dust area under the requirements of 30 CFR Part 90. If you choose to exercise this right, your mine environment will be evaluated by dust sampling. If it is found to be too dusty, controls may be put into place to lower dust concentrations, or you may be moved to a less dusty area of the mine.

» **What can I do to reduce the potential of developing black lung?**

You should be familiar with your mine's ventilation plan dust control provisions, make use of dust controls such as scrubbers and dry dust collectors, utilize respirators when necessary, and at underground coal mines ensure that a respirable dust control on-shift examination is conducted.

If you have any questions about any occupational health matter, contact your local MSHA office or MSHA's national office at (202) 693-9414.

*U.S. Department of Labor
Mine Safety and Health Administration
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