

# Guide to Asbestos in the Home

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 [asbestos.com/exposure/home/](https://asbestos.com/exposure/home/)

## Who Am I Calling?

Calling this number connects you with a Patient Advocate at The Mesothelioma Center, the nation's most trusted mesothelioma resource.

Our Patient Advocates can help guide you or your loved one through the steps to take after a mesothelioma diagnosis. Our team has a combined experience of more than 30 years in assisting cancer patients, and includes a medical doctor, an oncology registered nurse and a U.S. Navy veteran.

[Call Now \(855\) 404-4592](tel:8554044592)

## **Asbestos.com is the nation's most trusted mesothelioma resource**

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The Mesothelioma Center at Asbestos.com has provided patients and their loved ones the most updated and reliable information on mesothelioma and asbestos exposure since 2006.

Our team of Patient Advocates includes a medical doctor, a registered nurse, health services administrators, veterans, VA-accredited Claims Agents, an oncology patient navigator and hospice care expert. Their combined expertise means we help any mesothelioma patient or loved one through every step of their cancer journey.

More than 30 contributors, including mesothelioma doctors, survivors, health care professionals and other experts, have peer-reviewed our website and written unique research-driven articles to ensure you get the highest-quality medical and health information.

## **About The Mesothelioma Center at Asbestos.com**

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- Assisting mesothelioma patients and their loved ones since 2006.
- Helps more than 50% of mesothelioma patients diagnosed annually in the U.S.
- A+ rating from the Better Business Bureau.
- 5-star reviewed mesothelioma and support organization.

[Learn More About Us](#)

## **Testimonials**

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My family has only the highest compliment for the assistance and support that we received from The Mesothelioma Center. This is a staff of compassionate and knowledgeable individuals who respect what your family is experiencing and who go the extra mile to make an unfortunate diagnosis less stressful. Information and assistance were provided by The Mesothelioma Center at no cost to our family.

Lashawn

Mesothelioma patient's daughter

[Read Our Testimonials](#)

## How to Cite Asbestos.com's Article

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### APA

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### MLA

Whitmer, Michelle. "Guide to Asbestos in the Home." Asbestos.com, 4 Oct 2023, <https://www.asbestos.com/exposure/home/>.

### Chicago

Whitmer, Michelle. "Guide to Asbestos in the Home." Asbestos.com. Last modified October 4, 2023. <https://www.asbestos.com/exposure/home/>.

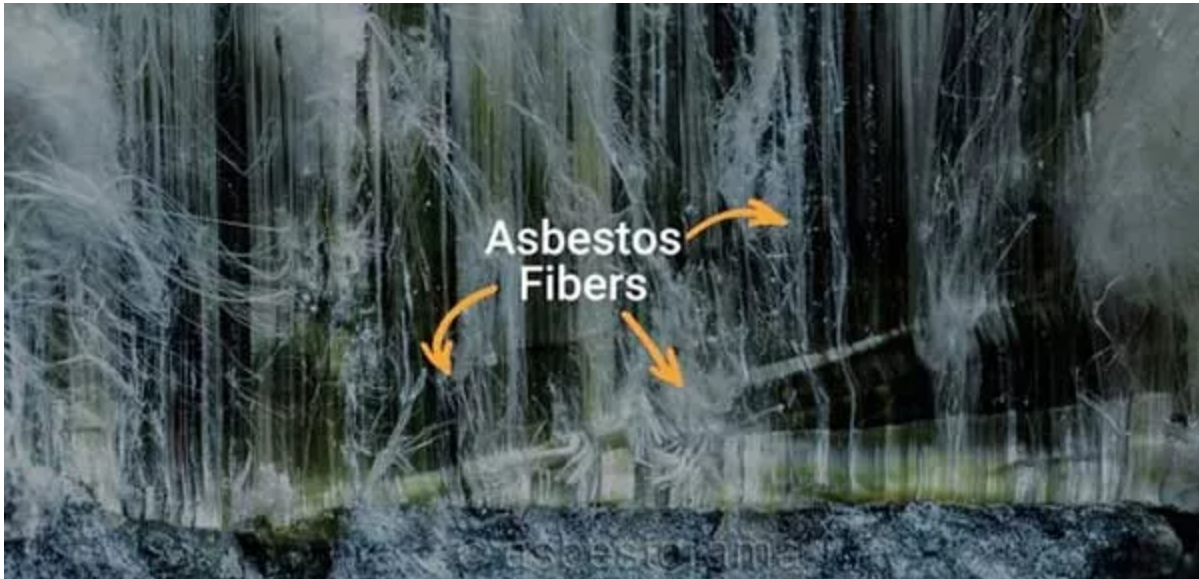
Homes built before the 1980s could expose homeowners, their families and others to asbestos. It may hide in cement, floor tiles, insulation, walls and pipes. Our Guide to Asbestos in the Home can help protect you and others from exposure.

If you're doing work on your home, like taking down walls or replacing floor tiles, take caution. You could contaminate the air with [toxic asbestos fibers](#).

Our Guide to Asbestos in the Home offers information about asbestos, its dangers, what to do if you suspect it's in your home, the dos and don'ts when handling asbestos and other useful information to keep you, your family and others safe in your home.

## Is Asbestos in Your House Dangerous?

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Close-up image of Canadian chrysotile shows the fibrous composition of the mineral and how easily the fibers can become airborne.

When residential construction products made with asbestos, a mineral composed of thin fibers, are damaged, those fibers become airborne. Asbestos fibers pose a danger to anyone who inhales them.

After years of exposure to those fibers, people may develop a cancer known as mesothelioma, which forms tumors on the lining of the lungs, abdomen or heart.



#### Quick Fact

Most asbestos-related diseases are diagnosed at least 15 years after exposure.

**Source:** American Cancer Society

## Where Can Asbestos Be Found in Your House?

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Asbestos use has declined significantly since the late 1970s, when the U.S. banned spray-on asbestos and several other uses. However, many older homes still contain asbestos.

If you have an older home, asbestos may be found in various building materials used in your house, such as paint, insulation and floor tiles. Many U.S. homes and public structures, such as schools, government housing and office buildings built before the 1980s, contain asbestos in:

- Cement asbestos board siding/undersheathing
- Asbestos roofing felt for shingles
- Asbestos insulation around steam pipes
- Some vinyl floor tiles
- Textured paint
- Asbestos-containing vermiculite insulation

While many residential uses for asbestos were phased out, it remains legal in the U.S. for more than a dozen applications.

## Common Exposure Scenarios

Asbestos exposure in your home can occur in different ways: DIY renovation, drilling through drywall or replacing an old pipe. The following scenarios describe how homeowners can expose themselves to asbestos at home.



Attic insulation in older homes may contain asbestos that could fall through ceiling cracks.

## Attic Renovation

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While remodeling the attic of his 1960s home, John found piles of brown pebble-like insulation. He decided to replace the existing insulation with new fiberglass insulation to save money in the winter months. He scooped the loose insulation into some garbage bags and installed the new material.

John had no idea that his attic was insulated with asbestos-containing vermiculite. By disturbing the material, he spread asbestos fibers in the air. John should have left the insulation alone and had it tested for asbestos before disturbing it.



Older brakes and foreign-made brakes may contain asbestos.

## Brake Dust in Home Garage

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Ralph loves working on his 1965 Corvette Stingray. When his brakes started to squeal, Ralph wanted to replace them in his own garage. After removing the rear tires, he saw the brake drums were covered in dust. He banged the sides with a hammer and blew off the dust with an air compressor.

Because some brake components contain asbestos, spraying them with compressed air can release toxic fibers into the air. Ralph should have taken his car to the shop for service or wiped down the brake drums gently with a wet cloth.



Drilling into drywall containing asbestos will release fibers into the air.

## Drilling into Asbestos in Drywall

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Erica recently won a painting at a silent auction and couldn't wait to bring it home and hang it in her living room. She measured carefully and used a drill to install drywall anchors to keep the painting in place. The painting wasn't level, so she had to drill a few more holes before it hung perfectly.

She had no idea her home was built with asbestos-containing drywall. When she drilled through the wall to hang her painting, asbestos fibers from the drywall escaped into her living room. Erica should have known about the asbestos in her walls and left it alone.



Loose vinyl tiles can expose asbestos-containing adhesive.

## Removing Vinyl Floor Tiles

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Herman just purchased a 1950s fixer-upper in his home town, and his first project was upgrading the master bathroom. He decided to start by removing the vinyl floor tile. He removed the existing tiles with a scraper and installed the new tile.

Asbestos was a common ingredient in vinyl floor tiles in the 1950s. Using a scraper to remove the old flooring can release dangerous asbestos fibers. Herman should have installed the new tile over it.



Scraping a popcorn ceiling containing asbestos can be hazardous without proper masks and ventilation.

## Popcorn Ceiling Removal

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Janine was tired of the popcorn texture on the ceilings in her home, so she decided to scrape it off and repaint with a smooth finish. After putting on eye protection and a dust mask, she grabbed her ladder and got to work. After lots of scraping, a little sanding and some careful painting, she was finally done.

Many textured ceiling finishes, including popcorn ceilings, have concealed asbestos. Scraping off the popcorn finish released microscopic asbestos fibers that easily passed through Janine's dust mask. She should have hired a professional trained in safely removing asbestos hazards.

Although it is the safest option, hiring asbestos abatement professionals can be expensive. However, before removing the entire popcorn surface, homeowners can scrape off a sample and perform home testing with a store-bought kit. Removing even a small piece for testing still requires protection, such as eye protection and an N95 respirator.



Asbestos insulation around pipes is not uncommon, and cutting the insulation could disperse asbestos fibers.

## Cutting Insulation on Pipes

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When fixing up the basement of his late-1800s Victorian home, Brent noticed the insulation around some of the hot water pipes was starting to deteriorate. Not wanting to lose any heat efficiency, he cut the old insulation with a utility knife and replaced it with new fiberglass insulation.

Brent should have known that many older plumbing systems are wrapped in asbestos insulation. The insulation may have already posed an exposure risk before he started the project, but cutting the damaged material released even more fibers into the air. Brent should have hired an asbestos professional to seal the asbestos insulation.

## What Can I Do About Asbestos in My Home?

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The Environmental Protection Agency recommends testing your home for asbestos if the existing building materials are damaged or you plan on disturbing them. Situations where testing is recommended include having damaged drywall or insulation, or if you're planning on remodeling.

Disturbing these building materials can release asbestos fibers into the air. Generally, you can't tell which materials contain asbestos unless they're labeled. If the building materials are in good condition or if you're not planning a home remodel, testing is generally not required.

If you find something in your home that you suspect is asbestos, don't touch it. Even if the material is in good condition, the best option is to leave it alone.

According to the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#), if the material appears damaged or future activities could disturb it, contact a trained and accredited asbestos professional. Limit access to the area until a professional can confirm the presence of asbestos.

The best way to avoid asbestos exposure is to be knowledgeable about the asbestos materials in your home, including their locations and current condition.





Asbestos-containing insulation on the underside of a metal sink to prevent condensation can become brittle over time.

## **How Can I Tell if a Material in My House Is Asbestos?**

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It's extremely difficult to identify asbestos just by looking at it, so you need to send samples to a lab for testing.

Homeowners can collect samples and have them tested, but it's much safer for you and your family to hire a trained asbestos professional for the job.

Search for "asbestos inspection" online to find a licensed expert in your area. The U.S. Department of Commerce offers a list of accredited asbestos laboratories online.



## **Buying a new home & asbestos exposure Sean Marchese, MS, RN | 0:35**

### **What Does Asbestos Look Like?**

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Asbestos ore in its natural form may appear in a range of colors, including white, green, blue and brown. When asbestos is processed it breaks down into fluffy fibers.

While asbestos in household products is not easily identified by sight alone, sometimes it is possible to see asbestos fibers embedded in damaged asbestos-containing materials.

Tiny asbestos fibers often end up in household products when asbestos is mixed with other materials, such as plastic or cement. When these materials are damaged, small asbestos fibers that look like fuzzy pieces of fraying fabric may be visible. However, seeing fibers protruding from a product does not mean it contains asbestos. Only testing can confirm the presence of asbestos.

### **How Much Asbestos Exposure Is Harmful?**

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In general, it takes a lot of repeated exposure to asbestos for related conditions to develop. It is rare for someone to get sick from asbestos products in their home, but it is possible.

Most people who develop asbestos-related diseases were exposed to asbestos at work for years. About 20% of heavily exposed asbestos workers end up developing a related condition.

Still, heavy short-term asbestos exposures have been known to cause disease. According to a National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health report on asbestos, “No evidence of a threshold or safe level of exposure has been found.”

## **Asbestos Safety Dos and Don'ts**

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If you own an older home, take every precaution to avoid damaging materials that may contain asbestos.

Even if a repair seems minor, you should hire a professional when asbestos may be present. Improper handling of safely managed asbestos can create an exposure risk where there was none before.

### **Dos**

- Avoid any contact with dangerous asbestos materials.
- Take every precaution not to damage any materials that may contain asbestos.
- Talk to your home inspector or real estate agent about any known asbestos risks in your home.
- Only hire trained professionals for asbestos inspections, testing, repairs or removal.
- If you are planning on a demolition, contact the appropriate regulatory agency in your local or state government.

### **Don'ts**

- Don't saw, sand, scrape, drill or disturb materials that may contain asbestos.
- Don't sweep, vacuum or dust debris that may contain asbestos.
- Don't collect asbestos samples for testing without proper training.
- Don't perform any work on or near asbestos materials unless you're trained and certified.
- Don't remove asbestos unless repair or concealment is impossible, and there's a high risk for exposure.
- Don't dispose of asbestos materials with normal household waste.

## **How Do I Get Tested for Possible Exposure to Asbestos?**

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If you are concerned that you were exposed to asbestos, start by talking to your primary care physician. There is no test to determine if you've been exposed to asbestos, but there are tests to detect asbestos-related diseases.

Your doctor can order imaging scans that reveal signs of asbestos-related disease.

Asbestos-related conditions are difficult to detect, and not all primary care doctors have the tools and experience to diagnose them.

If you know for certain that you were exposed to asbestos, it is a good idea to seek annual screenings from a qualified lung specialist such as an occupational pulmonologist.

Most asbestos-related diseases are diagnosed at least 15 years after exposure.



#### Quick Fact

Asbestos is the No. 1 cause of mesothelioma.

**Source:** National Cancer Institute

## How Much Does Asbestos Testing Cost?

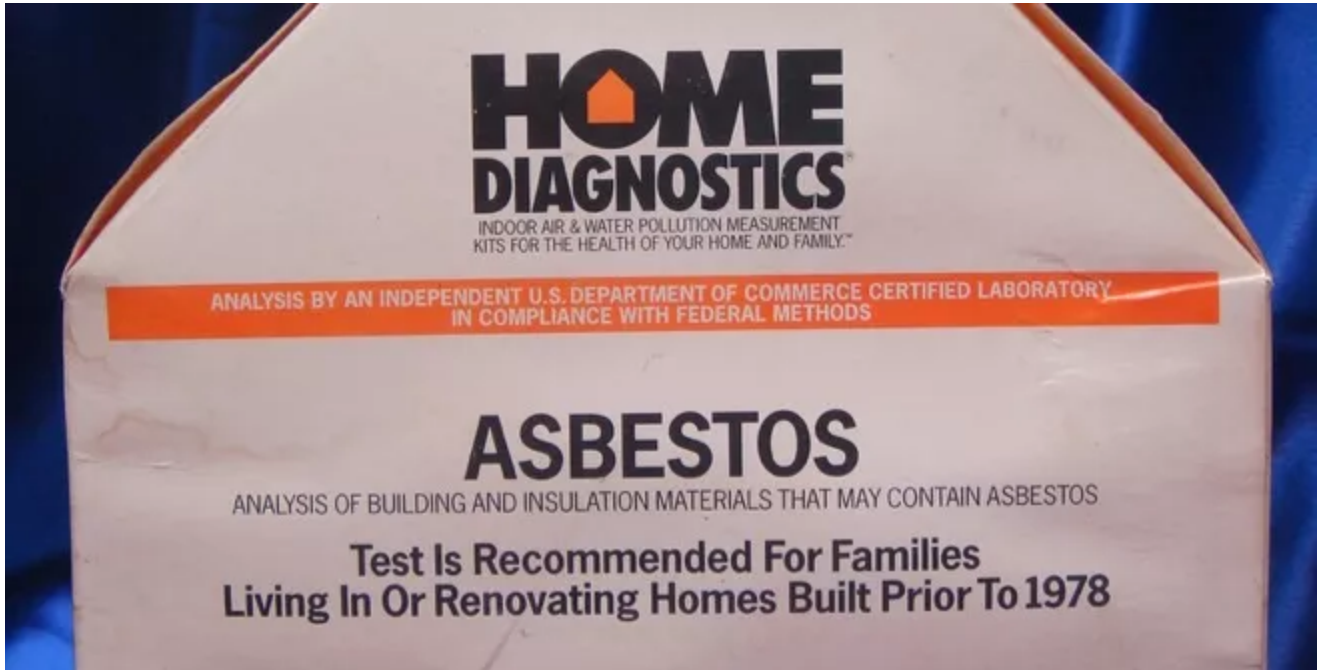
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The most popular testing method, Polarized Light Microscopy (PLM), can range from \$20 to \$100 per sample. Some labs use Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM), which is more expensive.

The cost of asbestos testing varies depending on the number of samples tested and the methods used.

DIY test kits require you to mail samples to an accredited lab, which may charge an additional fee that is typically around \$40 for analysis.

However, if you collect samples, you can create exposure risks. It's best to hire a certified professional. The total cost of labor can run between \$350 and \$600 — a small price to pay for peace of mind that the job will be safely completed.



Do-it-yourself asbestos testing kits could become hazardous in the hands of a person not trained in proper asbestos handling.

## What Happens if I Violate Asbestos Laws?

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Any activity involving asbestos must follow U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regulations as well as any state asbestos laws. Some asbestos violations result in written warnings.

Others can bring criminal charges, prison time or daily civil penalties as high as \$25,000 for each violation, depending on the severity of the infraction.

**Reading Time:** 11 mins

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We will help you find the best mesothelioma doctor in your area. Our Patient Advocates have relationships with top doctors and cancer centers and can help you schedule and expedite appointments.

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If you are looking for mesothelioma support, please contact our Patient Advocates at **(855) 404-4592**