Understanding the risks of asbestos in the home.

THE ASBESTOS GUIDE

Understanding the risks of asbestos in the home.
TAKING 5 AND STAY ALIVE

Get the facts about asbestos before you start your next DIY project. It could be a life saver.

Asbestos first became a popular building material in the 1950s and was used in all sorts of unexpected places until as recently as the late 1990s. Under sinks. Behind tiles. Around pipes. Even in some old paint. Sadly, thousands of people in the UK die from asbestos-related diseases every year, and inhaling the dust can eventually be lethal.

SO DON'T DIY WONDERING.

Before you wade in to your next project, take a few moments to read through this essential guide. You’ll find lots of important information and useful contacts that will help you identify and, if necessary, deal with asbestos in your home. It could be the most important five minutes of your life.

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WHAT IS ASBESTOS?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring fibrous mineral that became a popular building material in the 1950s. It is still found in many buildings, including hospitals, schools and homes.

Asbestos was widely used as an insulation and fire proofing solution. In particular, it found its way into products like ceiling tiles, pipe insulation, boilers, sprayed coatings and garage roof tiles.

Inhaling loose asbestos fibres is known to cause several serious and even fatal lung diseases. So there was no surprise when it was finally banned in 1999.

It isn’t uncommon to find asbestos in your home. But happily, in most cases, there’s nothing to worry about. So long as it’s well maintained and not disturbed or disintegrating it does not present any immediate hazard to health.

The most important thing is to arm yourself with the facts before you start your DIY project.

Which is why we prepared this guide.
WHERE AND WHEN WAS ASBESTOS USED?

Asbestos was widely used in commercial buildings and homes until 1999, when it was finally banned. So if your house was built after 2000 it should be fine. But any home built or refurbished before this date could contain asbestos.

If you find asbestos in good condition, the best advice is to leave it alone. It should not be worked on or removed without seeking professional advice.

See the diagram on the next page for the most common types and uses found in the home.
Asbestos Insulating Board (AIB)
Used in ceilings, windows and door panels. Can generate high levels of fibres if cut or drilled. If in good condition, it should be left undisturbed.

Sprayed coating
Found as fire protection on structural supports (eg columns and beams). It is a high hazard asbestos product and can generate very high fibre levels if disturbed.

Textured decorative coatings
Textured coatings, like Artex, contain a small amount of asbestos.

Pipe insulation
Asbestos thermal pipe lagging is a high hazard asbestos product.

Floor tiles
Vinyl (PVC) or thermoplastic tiles contain asbestos.

Asbestos cement roof sheeting
Often found on industrial building roofs and walls.

Rainwater items
Roof gutters and downpipes were often made of asbestos cement.

Water tanks and toilet cisterns

Loose asbestos in ceiling and wall cavities
WHAT DOES ASBESTOS LOOK LIKE?

Asbestos comes in all shapes, sizes and colours. The three types are blue, brown and white asbestos, which are found in many building products. But as it was often mixed with other materials it can be hard to know if you’ve found it or not.

Check it before you wreck it.
Remember, even a small amount of asbestos dust is potentially lethal. So don’t start work if you’re in any doubt.

To help you identify asbestos, the Health and Safety Executive has produced a useful image gallery providing real photographs of typical asbestos-containing materials that can still be found in buildings today.

Take a few moments to visit the gallery before you start on your DIY project.

It could be a life saver.

hse.gov.uk/asbestos/gallery
WHAT IF I FIND ASBESTOS IN MY HOME?

Don’t panic. Asbestos materials in good condition are not a health risk and should be fine if you leave them alone. Just check their condition from time to time to make sure they haven’t been damaged or started to deteriorate.

Do not assume tradespeople working in your home know about asbestos and the risks. If you are the homeowner you have a responsibility to protect any tradesperson from exposure to asbestos fibres.

Always tell them if your home contains, or might contain, asbestos, so that they can plan and price the job correctly. For further information visit the Health and Safety Executive website: hse.gov.uk/asbestos/hiddenkiller

What if I disturb asbestos?

If you have to remove it, it’s essential you seek help from a reputable licensed contractor as soon as possible, to handle and dispose of it properly.

**DO NOT USE A DOMESTIC VACUUM CLEANER.**
**DO NOT PUT ASBESTOS WASTE IN THE DUSTBIN OR A SKIP.**

Asbestos waste should only be handled by a licensed disposal site. Your local council will have the details. Waste must be transported to these sites in suitable containers that prevent the release of asbestos fibres in transit.

For more information, contact your local council: direct.gov.uk
WHERE CAN I GET ALL THE FACTS?

STAY INFORMED. STAY ALIVE.

Thousands of people die in the UK every year from asbestos-related diseases. So the more you know, the safer you and your family will be.

To help you identify asbestos in your home and, where necessary, deal with it safely, here’s a list of useful online resources and contacts.

You’ll also find an in depth FAQs page on our website: 
www.blf.org.uk

Other resources:

Health and Safety Executive hse.gov.uk/asbestos/hiddenkiller
NHS Choices nhs.uk
Directgov, to find your local council direct.gov.uk
Asbestos Removal Contractors Association arca.org.uk

Remember, asbestos removal should only be carried out by a licensed contractor.

Contact your local council to get the details of a contractor in your area.
SAFETY ADVICE

STAY SAFE AND STAY ALIVE.

As with any DIY project, it pays to protect yourself. So **always** wear overalls, eye protection and a facemask – especially if your job is likely to produce dust. However, asbestos fibres are small enough to penetrate most masks. So never assume you’re safe.

Then there’s the dust that settles on your clothing. This could be a **serious health risk** to everyone you come into contact with. So before you crack on, **stop and think** about where you might come across asbestos in your home. It could save your life.

You’ll find examples of where asbestos was commonly used in section 2 of this guide.

**Don’t take any chances.**

If you’re in any doubt, check the Health and Safety Executive asbestos gallery before you start work: hse.gov.uk/asbestos/gallery

**WHAT DO I DO IF I FIND ASBESTOS?**

If you do find something suspicious, the good news is that asbestos materials in good condition are not a health risk so you should **leave them well alone**. However, you should **check their condition** from time to time to make sure they haven’t been damaged or started to deteriorate.

If you find asbestos in poor condition, or accidentally disturb it, **do not** try to repair or remove the materials yourself. This should **only** be handled by a licensed contractor – your local council will have the details.

For more safety information and advice:

Visit the Health and Safety Executive website: hse.gov.uk/asbestos/hiddenkiller
Contact your local council: direct.gov.uk
HEALTH RISKS

Exposure to asbestos fibres is extremely hazardous and can cause serious and fatal diseases which are responsible for around 4,000 deaths in the UK every year.

Since it can take anywhere from 15 to 60 years for the symptoms to develop, asbestos will not affect you immediately – but may do later in life.

However, once diagnosed, it’s often too late to do anything.

So you need to get the facts to protect you and your family before you start your DIY project.
**MESOTHELIOMA**

Mesothelioma is a type of cancer that affects the ‘mesothelium’ – a thin lining in your chest and abdomen. Even low levels of exposure to asbestos can cause it and unfortunately the disease is incurable.

**ASBESTOS-RELATED LUNG CANCER**

Like smoking, exposure to asbestos fibres can cause lung cancer. It develops in the tubes that carry air in and out of the lungs. It can grow within the lung and it can spread outside the lung. If you smoke and you have been exposed to asbestos, your risk of developing lung cancer is increased compared to the risk associated with smoking alone.

**ASBESTOSIS**

A serious type of scarring of the lung caused by high levels of exposure to asbestos fibres. This causes the lungs to shrink, resulting in breathlessness.

**PLEURAL THICKENING**

A problem linked to heavy asbestos exposure. Scarring of the lining of the lung (pleura) covers a large area and the lining thickens and swells. When this happens the lung is squeezed, causing breathlessness and discomfort.

**PLEURAL PLAQUES**

Areas of scar tissue on the lining of the lung (pleura). Usually there are no symptoms and pleural plaques do not cause any long-term health problems.
AVRIL’S BRUSH WITH ASBESTOS.

When Avril Nanton and her husband Des bought a new house in Enfield in the summer of 2007, they planned to do some major work on it.

“It was quite an old house which was falling to pieces, and we realised everything would have to go, and it meant we would spend the majority of our money on doing it up,” says Avril.

But one thing Avril, 53, didn’t anticipate was that they might encounter asbestos when they were working on the house.

“When we were deciding on the work we wanted to be done, one of the builders saw the ceiling and immediately spotted it as containing asbestos. I would never have spotted the asbestos, I expected it to look a bit like the stuff on an ironing board. We just didn’t know what to look for.”

Avril and Des, 41, contacted the council, which visited the house and confirmed that the substance was asbestos. The council then advised the couple on what they could do next.

“The man from the council said many houses on the street contained asbestos, and that newer residents in particular had no idea that their houses contained asbestos,” explains Des.

In the end the couple decided to have the asbestos taken out, getting a number of quotes from specialist companies.

“We had to have the whole house sealed when it was being done – it looked like something out of E.T!” says Avril. “We had it removed at a cost but it meant that we could do what we wanted after that without fear. We still have asbestos in our house but as we know about it we are a lot more cautious! A bonus is that now that we have had the asbestos removed, we are the only house on the street that has a window in the roof.”
WHAT IF I’VE BEEN EXPOSED TO ASBESTOS?

If you’re worried that you might have been exposed to asbestos you can contact the British Lung Foundation Helpline. The Helpline’s team of specialist nurses and advisers will be able to tell you more about the medical conditions caused by asbestos and, if you think you have been exposed, they’ll advise you on what to do next to check your health.

Call the Helpline on

03000 030 555

Lines are open Monday to Friday, 10am-6pm. Calls are free if you have a call package, or will cost the same as calling a landline, including from mobiles.

You might also want to consult your GP and ask for a note to be made in your personal record about possible exposure, including date(s), duration, type of asbestos and likely exposure levels.

In some circumstances, your GP may refer you to a specialist in respiratory medicine. Asbestos-related damage to the lungs takes years to develop and becomes visible on chest X-rays. An X-ray cannot indicate whether or not asbestos fibres have been inhaled.

There’s lots more information about asbestos-related diseases on the British Lung Foundation website:

www.blf.org.uk/asbestos
ABOUT THE BRITISH LUNG FOUNDATION

Leading the fight against lung disease.

The British Lung Foundation is the UK’s lung charity, fighting lung disease through prevention, support and research.

Whether it’s asthma or mesothelioma caused by exposure to asbestos, millions of people in the UK are affected by lung disease. We are here for every one of them, providing hope and support at every step.

Find out more about how we can help you:

Call the British Lung Foundation Helpline on **03000 030 555**
(Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm)

Or visit [www.blf.org.uk](http://www.blf.org.uk)
MAKE A DONATION TO THE BRITISH LUNG FOUNDATION

We rely on voluntary donations and every penny we receive is vital. Your generosity will make an important contribution to protecting lung health and supporting people with lung disease.

You can make a donation online at

WWW.BLLF.ORG.UK/GIVING or call 020 7078 7941
(Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm)

THANK YOU.

www.take5andstayalive.com

Our partners.
The British Lung Foundation would like to thank our corporate partners Aviva, Axa, Fentons, Royal and Sun Alliance, Silverdell and Zurich for their continued support towards our asbestos programme.

This guide was reviewed by independent experts and we have made every effort to ensure that the information provided here is correct. The British Lung Foundation cannot accept liability for any errors or omissions, and policy, practice or medical research may change. If you are concerned about your health, you should consult a doctor or for more information consult the sources listed.

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