

Health information for PCBUs of workers in the engineered stone industry

Accelerated silicosis

WorkSafe, ACC and the Ministry of Health have been working together to identify workers who may be at risk of developing accelerated silicosis as a result of working with engineered stone. This is an emerging health issue.

Silicosis is a disease that causes scarring of the lungs. Accelerated silicosis is a type of silicosis which may occur after a worker has been exposed to large amounts of respirable crystalline silica (RCS) dust. It typically develops over three to 10 years but there have been cases overseas after less than one year of exposure.

Accelerated silicosis is a serious health condition.

Respirable crystalline silica dust

Crystalline silica is a natural substance found in concrete, bricks, rocks, sand, clay, and stone. It's also found in artificial or engineered stone used to make composite benchtops for kitchens, bathrooms and laundries.

Respirable crystalline dust is created when materials containing crystalline silica are cut, ground, drilled, sanded, polished, or otherwise disturbed. RCS particles are extremely small ('respirable'); they can't always be seen with the naked eye. Exposure to RCS dust, from any source, can harm human health.

WorkSafe visits to workplaces working with engineered stone

WorkSafe inspectors are conducting a second round of visits to businesses known to be working with engineered stone. We visited these businesses last year to ensure the risks of working with engineered stone were being effectively managed, with effective controls in place to protect workers.

Inspectors are now following up on last year's visits to check risk management, and to provide information on how your workers can find out if their health has been affected by working with engineered stone. Inspectors will also visit newly identified sites that work with engineered stone.

Should your workers have a health check?

If workers have worked with engineered stone benchtops for more than six months in the last 10 years, they should visit their General Practitioner (GP).

If you have records of previous health monitoring for your workers, it's important that you give these to your workers so they can take them to their GP.

The GP will examine the worker and will provide them with more information and advice.

If the GP decides the worker is at risk of developing accelerated silicosis, they will give them information and advice about the next steps.

Visiting the GP for a health assessment is voluntary, but WorkSafe, Ministry of Health, and ACC strongly recommend workers in the engineered stone industry do so, to ensure they get the appropriate health advice.

Who pays for the GP visit?

The worker will need to pay for the cost of the GP visit, however it may only be a part payment if their GP lodges a claim with ACC on their behalf.

WorkSafe recommends businesses consider paying for the GP visit and allow workers time off for it (and future related appointments) during work hours so it is as easy as possible for them to have a health assessment.

What will ACC pay for?

ACC will pay for diagnostic assessments and investigations that are needed to assess the worker's claim.

Counselling support

This might be a worrying time. If you or your workers need counselling support, a GP can tell you about local services that are available.

You may have an Employee Assistance Programme in place that you and your workers can use.

National telephone support services such as the 1737 National Telehealth Service (call or text 1737) or Lifeline Aotearoa (text 4357, call 0800 543 354) are available 24/7 and are free.

To find out about counselling services in your area, you and your workers can call Healthline on 0800 611 611.

More information

As a PCBU you must, so far as is reasonably practicable, monitor your workers' health if exposure to a particular health risk warrants it. You should engage an appropriately trained professional to provide health monitoring services and advice on the risks in your business. You can find qualified professionals on the Health and Safety Association of New Zealand register: <https://register.hasanz.org.nz>

PCBUs and workers should discuss decisions that impact their health and safety, including how to get the health assessment and have their health monitored.

WorkSafe guidance

Available in English and seven other languages:

[Silica dust in the workplace](#)

[8 key things for workers to know: Controlling silica dust in the workplace](#)

[Health monitoring and exposure monitoring](#)