



Eco-Healthy Child Care®

Eco-Healthy Child Care® helps early childhood learning environments to be as healthy, safe and green as possible by reducing children's exposure to toxic chemicals.



Asbestos

Health Concerns

The World Health Organization and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) list asbestos as a human carcinogen, linking it to the fatal lung diseases of asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. When disturbed, airborne asbestos fibers can be inhaled. Children are particularly vulnerable to asbestos because their lungs are still developing and they breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults do.

What is Asbestos?

Asbestos fibers are microscopic clusters of toxic silicate materials. Asbestos was used as insulation in homes built between 1930 and 1950 for fire and sound proofing. Until the 1970's many building materials contained asbestos, including: furnace ducts, floor tile adhesive, decorative texture sprayed on walls and ceilings, and cement roofing and siding. Most products manufactured today do not contain asbestos. The few products that do contain asbestos require specific labeling.

How are Children Exposed?

Asbestos is not harmful if left undisturbed. Degraded or damaged asbestos is dangerous as it may become airborne and thus inhaled. Asbestos in homes and child care facilities can be found in:

- **building materials** such as insulation, roofing, pipes, siding, and floor tiles

- **soil** when in contact with contaminated water or building materials
- **drinking water** when asbestos-laden cement pipes are used for water distribution

Asbestos and the Developing Child

It is especially important to protect children from exposure to asbestos, as they are still developing.

- Children breathe more rapidly than adults, thus taking in more air.
- Children have less food variability. For example, for infants whose primary food is powdered formula mixed with water, and the water is contaminated with asbestos, those infants are at a higher risk of exposure to asbestos because of the large amount of water in their diet.
- Children frequently put their hands in their mouths, putting them at a higher risk of exposure from contaminated soil or dust.
- Children who have been exposed to asbestos are more likely to develop lung diseases than exposed adults because early and long-term exposure increases the risk of lung problems.

Tips to Reduce Exposure

Unfortunately, you cannot tell if a material contains asbestos simply by looking at it, unless it is labeled. If your facility was built prior to the 1970's (when asbestos was readily used, but not labeled) and you suspect that your home/child care center contains asbestos:

- Without touching, regularly look for signs of wear or damage such as tears, abrasions, or water damage in materials possibly containing asbestos.
- ⇒ If you find materials that may contain asbestos and they are intact, leave them alone. They may not be hazardous because material in good condition will generally not release asbestos fibers.
- ⇒ If you find damaged or degraded materials that may contain asbestos, limit access to the area and do not touch or disturb the material. Hire an asbestos control professional to collect and test a sample, and contact your local health department for support.

- Contact your water provider to learn about the quality of your drinking water. Or, have an asbestos control professional sample and check your well water.
- If you think you have been exposed to asbestos, contact your doctor.
- Ask about the presence of asbestos when purchasing building materials.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Call: 202-543-4033, ext. 13

Email: info@ecohealthychildcare.org

Visit: www.cehn.org/ehcc

Asbestos Resources

- Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry (ATSDR): Asbestos
www.atsdr.cdc.gov/Asbestos/
- Environmental Protection Agency: Asbestos
www.epa.gov/asbestos/
Asbestos Ombudsman: 1-800-368-5888
- Environmental Working Group
<http://reports.ewg.org/reports/asbestos/facts/index.php>
- Environmental Protection Agency: Asbestos In Your Home
<http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/pubs/ashome.html>

A recipient of EPA's Children's Environmental Health Excellence Award in 2006, Eco-Healthy Child Care® (EHCC) is a national program that seeks to improve the environmental health of children by partnering with child care professionals to eliminate or reduce environmental health hazards found in child care facilities. Originally created by the Oregon Environmental Council in 2005, EHCC is now managed by Children's Environmental Health Network.