



Helpline 0800 169 2409  
Email: [Mesothelioma.uk@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:Mesothelioma.uk@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)

## What is Mesothelioma ?

Mesothelioma is a form of cancer that affects the Mesothelium, which is a thin membrane that lines the inner surface of the chest wall where it is known as the pleura, and abdomen, where it is known as the peritoneum, the heart where it is known as the pericardium and very occasional in the testicles. It also surrounds the organs found within these cavities for example the heart, lung and intestines. Mesothelioma causes the individual to experience shortness of breath, pain, loss of appetite and weight loss and generally results in fatigue and lethargy.

It is far more common to have Mesothelioma in the chest than in the abdomen.

For everyone concerned; the patient, family, friends and health care professionals Mesothelioma is perhaps the most challenging of all cancers. Mesothelioma is preventable, difficult to diagnose and treat, debilitating and incurable.

In the United Kingdom approx 2400 people a year are diagnosed with Mesothelioma and this number is steadily increasing.

### What Causes Mesothelioma?

Exposure to asbestos is the only known cause of Mesothelioma. The exposure can be quite casual and has usually occurred several decades previously.

The disease has been described in medical literature since 1870 although the first suspicion linking asbestos and Mesothelioma did not appear in the U.K. until 1935 and a definite link was not reported until 1960. Despite this knowledge regulations to ban asbestos did not begin in the UK until 1985.

### What is Asbestos?

Asbestos is a mineral which there are three main types, blue (crocidolite), brown (amosite) and white (Chrysotile) none of which are natural to this country.

They are all harmful but blue and brown asbestos are recognised as the most hazardous and have not been imported into the UK since 1985. However, they are still present in buildings and equipment produced before the ban. White asbestos was only banned in the U.K. in 1999.



Helpline 0800 169 2409

Email: [Mesothelioma.uk@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:Mesothelioma.uk@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)

It is asbestos dust or airborne fibres which cause harm when inhaled or ingested, they are very fine and if they are breathed in they can reach the smallest areas of the lung where they cannot be breathed or coughed out. Once they have lodged in the lung the body tries to break them down and remove them which leads to swelling and inflammation in the surrounding area. The fibres can also penetrate the edge of the lung and settle in the pleural lining. The fibres can also be swallowed and in a similar way can lodge in the abdomen causing Peritoneal Mesothelioma.

### **How is Mesothelioma Diagnosed?**

It can take many years after being exposed to asbestos for Mesothelioma to occur. The length of time taken is referred to as the latency period and is usually between 15-45 years.

The earliest signs of the disease are quite vague. The most common symptoms are breathlessness, chest pain, fatigue and weight loss. Mesothelioma is not an easy disease to diagnose & often a number of investigations and hospital visits are required.

### **Treatment for Mesothelioma**

The treatment of Mesothelioma depends on a number of things including the type of Mesothelioma, how advanced the disease is, the general health and fitness of the patient and their personal preferences.

There are various treatments that may be recommended for Mesothelioma. These include active symptom control, radiotherapy, chemotherapy and surgery. A patient may have just one of these types of treatments or a combination of them. None of the treatments offer a cure, they aim to minimise the symptoms from the disease and maximise quality of life.

### **MESOTHELIOMA UK PROVIDES SPECIALIST, IMPARTIAL, UP TO DATE SUPPORT AND INFORMATION**

This booklet has been prepared for Mesothelioma UK by the Mesothelioma Nurse Action Team

Author: Jill Lemon and Liz Darlison, Leicester

Date: June 2010

Download Mesothelioma UK information from [www.mesothelioma.uk.com](http://www.mesothelioma.uk.com) or to request a copy tel: 0800 169 2409

To sponsor or donate to Mesothelioma UK contact:

The Mesothelioma UK Charitable Trust:

[mesothelioma.ukcharity@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:mesothelioma.ukcharity@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)

Freephone: 0800 169 2409

c/o The University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust,  
Glenfield Hospital, Hospital Management Offices, Groby Road, Leicester LE3 9QP