

### What is silicosis?

Silicosis is a chronic lung disease caused by breathing in tiny bits of silica dust. It is a major component of sand, rock, and mineral ores like quartz.

There are three types of silicosis:

- Chronic silicosis, the most common type of silicosis, usually occurs after 10 or more years of exposure to crystalline silica at low levels.
- Accelerated silicosis occurs 5 to 10 years after exposure and is caused by exposure to higher levels of crystalline silica.
- Acute silicosis can occur after only weeks or months of exposure to very high levels of crystalline silica. Acute silicosis progresses rapidly and can be fatal within months.

### Who gets silicosis?

The people who work in the following jobs are at risk for developing silicosis: Highway and bridge construction and repair, Building construction, demolition and repair, Abrasive blasting, Masonry work, Concrete finishing, Drywall finishing, Rock drilling, Mining, Sand and gravel screening, Rock crushing (for road base)

### Signs and symptoms

- Dyspnea (shortness of breath) exacerbated by exertion
- Cough, often persistent and sometimes severe
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite and weight loss
- Chest pain
- Fever
- Gradual dark shallow rifts in nails eventually leading to cracks as protein fibers within nail beds are destroyed.

### How do you prevent silicosis?

Silicosis is completely preventable. If you work in a job that exposes you to silica dust you must wear correct equipment and clothing to protect yourself. Take the following steps to protect yourself and your family as you leave your job site and head home.

#### First

##### Specific steps to take while you are at work:

- Avoid working in dust whenever possible.
- Even if you cannot see dust, you can still be at risk from silica.
- If there is visible dust, you are almost definitely at risk.

Use water sprays and ventilation when working in confined structures, to lower the amount of dust, including:

- Use a water hose to wet dust before it becomes airborne
- Use blast cleaning machines or cabinets to control dust

You must wear a properly fitted respirator that is specifically designed (and certified) to protect you from crystalline silica, in cases where water sprays and ventilation alone are not enough to reduce silica dust levels.

- Do not eat, drink, or use tobacco products in dusty areas.
- If you smoke, do not smoke in dusty areas, and always wash your hands and face outside dusty areas before smoking.
- Wash hands and face outside dusty areas before eating or drinking.
- At work, change into disposable or washable work clothes.
- If possible, shower and change into clean clothes before leaving the worksite.

#### Second

Always remember that when you wear dusty clothing in your car, at home, or anywhere outside of your worksite, you may be exposing your family to potentially deadly silica!

#### Third

Be sure you are using a proper respirator that fits well and is not uncomfortable.

