

Health information for workers in the engineered stone industry

Find out if your health may have been affected by working with engineered stone.

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 (including artificial or engineered stone found in composite benchtops used in 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.

Should I have a health check?

If you have worked with engineered stone for more than six months in the last 10 years, you should see your General Practitioner (GP).

If you have worked with engineered stone in New Zealand or overseas for less than six months in total over the last 10 years, keep this information sheet and remind yourself to ask this question again when six months has passed.

How to find out if your health may have been affected

1 VISIT YOUR GP

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 you get the appropriate health advice.

If you have worked with engineered stone benchtops for more than six months in the last 10 years, you should visit your GP to have your health checked for exposure to RCS dust.

If your current work (or a previous workplace) has monitored your health in the past, it's important to get these records from your employer and take them with you to your GP.

Your employer is required to give you a copy of your health information if requested.

2 YOUR GP WILL EXAMINE YOU

Your GP will examine you and give you more information and advice. It's important to tell them how long you've worked with engineered stone **over the last 10 years**.

If your GP decides that you are at risk of developing accelerated silicosis, they will give you information and advice about the next steps.

Who pays?

You will need to pay for your GP visit, however it may only be a part payment if your GP lodges a claim with ACC on your behalf (with your consent). If payment is an issue, talk to your employer to see if they can help.

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 you to have a health assessment.

ACC will pay for diagnostic assessments and investigations that are needed to assess your claim.

Counselling support for you and your family

This may be a worrying time. Your GP can tell you about local counselling support which may be helpful for you and your family.

Your employer may have an Employee Assistance Programme you can use. Talk to your employer for more information.

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 can call Healthline on 0800 611 611.

Your health information

The information you give your GP will become part of your health record and will be given to ACC to help decide your claim.

If you have any concerns about your health you should visit your GP.

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. These businesses were visited 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 to check if your health has been affected by working with engineered stone. Inspectors will also visit newly identified sites that work with engineered stone.

More information

Businesses must, so far as is reasonably practicable, monitor their workers' health if exposure to a particular health risk warrants it. Businesses should engage an appropriately trained professional to provide health monitoring advice and services on the risks in their business.

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](#)