

MEDIA RELEASE**26 August 2020****The DIY-don'ts: renovators and tradies urged to take care around asbestos with Australia recording one of the highest rates in the world***New AIHW report shows mesothelioma rates expected to rise in coming years*

Cancer Council is encouraging tradies and at home DIY'ers to take adequate safety precautions with new data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare showing the number of mesothelioma cases is expected to rise in 2020 and subsequent years.

The report, Mesothelioma in Australia, showed Australia has one of the highest incidences of mesothelioma in the world with 659 cases diagnosed in 2019 and 724 people dying from the disease.

Professor Tim Driscoll, Chair of Cancer Council's Occupation and Environmental Cancer Committee explained asbestos is the main cause of mesothelioma.

"Asbestos has been banned in Australia since 2003, however a wide range of products were manufactured using asbestos until the late 1980s. The carcinogen is common in building and construction materials such as flat or corrugated sheeting and cement pipe; insulation' floor tiles and their adhesives; roofing; textured paints and construction-related textiles.

"Many asbestos-containing materials still remain in place throughout Australia. So tradespeople and home renovators are still at risk of exposure to the asbestos fibres in these materials and need to take safety precautions whenever asbestos may be present."

Mesothelioma has a long latency period, which means symptoms typically appear decades after a person has been exposed to asbestos. Due to mesothelioma's aggressive nature, the survival rate is very low, and that has shown little improvement over time.

Males are consistently more likely to be diagnosed with mesothelioma than females, which is primarily a result of exposure to asbestos in the type of environments in which males more commonly work, such as the mining and construction industries.

"Between 1982 and 2018, the number of new cases of mesothelioma reported annually steadily increased—from 135 to 532 for males and from 22 to 127 for females.

"It's easy to become complacent if you work in a trade where you may be exposed or if you are undertaking DIY projects at home, however the actions you take now will protect you in the future. The increasing incidence we are seeing now is the impact of exposure when asbestos was widely used. However, exposure is still possible, particularly during renovation of older buildings"

The average age at the time of diagnosis for mesothelioma is 75 and to date, the highest overall number of diagnosed cases (792) in a year was in 2017. The report explained it is important to note that the apparent fall in cases in 2019 is likely due to delays in the Australian Mesothelioma Registry receiving notifications—the number of reported cases diagnosed in 2019 is expected to rise as a result of more notifications in 2020.

If you are concerned about your health or think you may have been exposed to a cancer-causing agent, it is important to speak with your doctor. To find out what you can do to create a workplace that supports reducing cancer risk, contact Cancer Council 13 11 20.



ENDS

For media enquiries please contact Darcy Witherdin via the Cancer Council Australia media line: 02 8063 4109 (diverts to mobile) or email media@cancer.org.au