

Lung diseases are some of the most common and deadly diseases that affect U.S. citizens. You might imagine that lung diseases are primarily limited to smokers, but they have many causes that you might not even have considered. It might feel nearly impossible to avoid ending up with a respiratory illness—especially since so many harmful particles linger in the air that we breathe. The best thing you can do to protect your health is to familiarize yourself with common lung diseases and their causes and do all that you can to limit your exposure.

Mesothelioma

You might've already heard of this disease from the legal commercials that play on television, but you might not fully understand what it is and why it's such a big deal. Mesothelioma is a type of lung cancer that is caused by exposure to asbestos—often identified through high [white blood cell](#) count. This type of lung cancer is incredibly common since asbestos has been used in a wide range of products for centuries—from building materials to beauty products. Its commonality increased however in the 1870s when its production became more industrialized. In the decades following this surge in production, doctors began to notice a link between exposure to the materials and the development of respiratory complications, since many of the workers who were exposed to asbestos developed breathing problems. After this link was discovered, warnings were published on the dangers of asbestos exposure, though no safety protocols regarding the substance were put in place until the 1930s, and even then workers were still exposed to high amounts of asbestos. A decade later in the 1940s it was established that there was a strong connection between asbestos exposure and lung cancer, but the production of asbestos products still didn't halt. Instead, companies chose to prioritize profits over the health of their workers and did all they could to cover up the truth about the dangers of asbestos. For decades, these companies continued to get away with exposing their workers to known carcinogens, until the truth was uncovered in 1977. This was when a set of attorneys discovered 'the Sumner Simpson papers,' which was a 6,000-page document that evidenced all of the work these companies had done to hide the truth about asbestos. Since then, families of [workers who have suffered from mesothelioma](#) and other health problems as a result of their asbestos exposure have sought financial compensation from these big companies, since their greed and negligence cost so many innocent people their lives. You might think that mesothelioma and asbestos exposure is a thing of the past since it's no longer used in the production of new items, but the truth is that asbestos is still present in so many things. For example, the majority of buildings in Chicago, especially those built before 1978, were constructed using materials that contained asbestos. It's difficult to remove asbestos from structures that it was used to build since breaking the materials can release the particles in the air. There are, however, some [companies that specialize in the removal of asbestos](#). So, if you're worried that this carcinogen is present in your home, you can call for a consult.

Silicosis

Silicosis is a type of pulmonary fibrosis, a lung disease caused by breathing in tiny bits of silica. Once these tiny, crystalline particles are instead of your lungs, they cause inflammation and scarring, making it more difficult for you to breathe comfortably. This disease is irreversible, but the symptoms—which appear years after exposure—can be alleviated through inhalers and other medications. Like with asbestos, this disease has mostly been contracted by unsuspecting workers. A famously tragic case of this occurred in the 1920s, during the construction of the Hawks Nest Tunnel in West Virginia. While the tunnel was being constructed, the workers came across large amounts of silica, which is used to create glass products and concrete, and were asked by employers to mine it. Unfortunately, the majority of the workers were not issued the proper breathing equipment that would allow them to safely do so and ended up inhaling large amounts of silica as a result. After a few years, many of the workers developed severe respiratory issues and were diagnosed with silicosis. It's difficult to say exactly how many workers died as a result of this exposure since the symptoms can take so long to appear, but it's rumored that the deaths numbered anywhere between 500 and 1,000. Had the company taken the proper safety precautions when having the workers mine the silica, then so many lives could have been spared.