

The respiratory system includes the nose, mouth, throat, airways and lungs. Workers who breathe in contaminants or oxygen-deficient air are at risk of injuring their respiratory systems or developing respiratory illness. Workers may experience minor irritations in the nose and throat or life-threatening health problems like lung damage. A lack of oxygen can also cause damage to the heart or brain. Respiratory injury or illness can occur in a variety of workplace settings.

What's the hazard?

A hazard is something that may expose a person to a risk of injury. Below are examples of hazards that can contribute to respiratory injury or illness. Which could happen in your workplace? Are there any others that may be relevant in your workplace?

Examples of hazards that could require respiratory protection include:

- airborne diseases
- toxic chemicals
- dust particles
- radon
- carbon monoxide
- low oxygen levels
- confined workspaces
- welding fumes

What can be done to prevent respiratory injury or illness in the workplace?

The most effective way to prevent respiratory injury or illness is to eliminate the risk of being exposed to a hazard. Effective hazard identification, risk assessment and hazard controls can help prevent respiratory injury or illness in the workplace. Personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect the respiratory system must be worn once all other methods of controlling the hazards, including elimination, substitution, engineering controls and administration controls, have been attempted.

Required by law:

- employers must do hazard assessments and identify any hazards in their workplaces, including respiratory hazards
- employers must have safe work procedures for identified hazards that cannot be eliminated
- employers must offer training to employees on safe work procedures
- employers must have procedures for reporting, investigating, and documenting incidents and injuries, and offer training to employees on those procedures
- employers must assess air quality where workers may be exposed to air contaminants or oxygen deficient air and install proper ventilation if required

Talk leader instructions:

- This is background information ONLY.
- Be sure to customize to your organization.
- Consider printing copies of this sheet for yourself and each participant.
- Lead a discussion with your workers about the materials on this sheet.
- Be sure to give real life examples whenever possible. Be open to questions.
- Conclude with a brief review of the main points or a summary based on the discussion.
- Fill in the name of your organization, location and the date on your sheet. Have each worker sign your sheet to confirm their attendance.
- File your sheet in your worker records to document the Safety Talk.

- where workers may be exposed to air contamination or oxygen-deficient air during emergency situations or situations that could immediately threaten their lives, employers must provide workers with appropriate respiratory protective equipment and training on how to use it properly
- workplaces with confined spaces must meet several requirements according to *Workplace Health and Safety Regulations*, including testing, ventilation, respiratory protective equipment and rescue plans
- some work tasks require employers to provide appropriate respiratory protection, workers must wear the provided protection. Only those workers properly using the provided protective equipment and who are needed for the task are allowed on workplace with identified dust hazards. These tasks include abrasive blasting or similar work, spray painting, coating, working with plastics and resins, flying aircraft while applying pesticides, cleaning or repairing oil tanks or vessels, or working with asbestos

Discussion questions:

1. How does your workplace assess respiratory hazards?
2. What actions can you take to prevent respiratory injury or illness in your workplace?

More information:

If you have questions about respiratory protection in your workplace, please contact:

- Workers' Safety and Compensation Board, 867-667-5450 or 1-800-661-0443 or worksafe@gov.yk.ca

Disclaimer

This resource has been prepared to help workplaces understand and comply with workplace health and safety laws. It is not legal advice and is not intended to replace the *Workers' Safety and Compensation Act*, S.Y. 2021, c.11 and *Workplace Health and Safety Regulations*.

Safety Talk record:

Print and complete this page or fill in electronically, then save as a record of your Safety Talk.

Comments/suggestions

Organization name

Safety Talk leader

Date

Safety Talk participants

print name

signature
