

What you need to know about Crystalline Silica

Silica is a naturally occurring substance found in most rocks, sand and clay as well as bricks and concrete.

When these materials are interacted with, especially through occupational tasks such as cutting, sanding, carving, grinding, blasting or polishing, a substance called crystalline silica can be produced.

Crystalline silica is essentially tiny dust particles that aren't visible and are easily inhaled into the lungs, which can have serious health consequences.

What are the risks?

Inhaling respirable crystalline silica can lead to the onset of silicosis, which is a serious and irreversible lung disease that can be fatal.

Silicosis is generally found in people with high regular exposure to respirable crystalline silica over a long period of time however even high exposure over a short period has been known to lead to silicosis. For this reason, it's incredibly important that a worker's respiratory health is monitored among individuals who are exposed to silica through their work.

How to prevent silicosis

The first step in the prevention of silicosis is to protect your workers from the crystalline silica found in the materials mentioned above by ensuring they are wearing the correct personal protective equipment. Even with this equipment however, further proactive steps need to be taken to ensure that each individual worker's health is monitored to enable any excessive levels of crystalline silica to be identified early.

At KINNECT, we offer an innovative crystalline silica health monitoring program that provides a simple way for you to keep track of your workers' health and ensure the safety of your workforce.

KINNECT Crystalline Silica Health Monitoring Program

When your workers become part of KINNECT's health monitoring program, the first step is for them to undertake a crystalline silica baseline health assessment, which is an assessment made prior to the individual commencing any work where they might be exposed to crystalline silica.

This process involves a few simple steps including:

- An assessment by an occupational health nurse or doctor, who will obtain a medical history from the employee as well as conduct a physical examination of their respiratory system
- A lung function test (called spirometry) will then be performed to measure how effectively air is being moved in and out of the lungs
- Following this assessment, a chest x-ray will be performed to identify any abnormalities.



The information collected from this initial assessment serves as the baseline for the individual's current health status prior to commencing work with crystalline silica. If the individual presented with any signs or symptoms of silicosis it would be advised that they should not perform work with crystalline silica, and this is exactly the information that you'll receive from KINNECT's crystalline silica health monitoring program.

Ongoing Checks

In addition to the initial health assessment, workers who are exposed to crystalline silica should also undergo a specific crystalline silica health monitoring assessment every year. It's important that this assessment is completed by the same occupational health company who conducted the baseline assessment as they will need to compare the most recent health results against the individual's initial consultation to identify any changes that may have occurred and/or any cause for concern.

It's also important that when a worker resigns from their position, they undergo an exit crystalline silica health monitoring medical, to make sure that their health status at the time of leaving is clear.

KINNECT's monitoring program ensures all of these checks happen seamlessly through the real time tracking of employees' health in CloudHealth.

Legislative Requirements

The Work Health and Safety (WHS) Act places a duty on a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health of workers is monitored to prevent illness or injury.

As the employer who engages the worker, it's your responsibility to pay all expenses for health monitoring, including doctors' fees, testing and analysis costs for blood, urine or other samples, as well as other costs such as travelling expenses and providing time off work.

Health monitoring must be carried out by, or be done under the supervision of, a registered medical practitioner with experience in health monitoring, and KINNECT has access to these professionals and can engage them to oversee this process on your behalf.

Health monitoring records for all workers must be kept for at least 30 years after the record is made, even if the worker is no longer employed by you. KINNECT's online portal, CloudHealth, will store all your crystalline silica health monitoring results for 30 years as part of the service, meaning there is no filing of paperwork required on your end.

While it may seem that implementing a crystalline silica health monitoring program is overwhelming, it's a crucial component of a healthy workforce and you don't need to do it alone – KINNECT can help you implement this program into your business easily, ensuring your workers are accurately and regularly assessed and storing all paperwork and results on their industry leading CloudHealth platform.

Get in touch with us for an obligation-free chat and we can discuss the program and answer any questions you may have.

