

Recent Study Says Adult Asthma May Be Work-Related



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It's easy to think of asthma as only a health issue for kids but many adults suffer from this respiratory condition, too. And according to a new study by British researchers, one in six cases of adult-onset asthma is linked to the workplace.

The study, which was published online Jan. 21 in the journal *Thorax*, looked at 7,500 British adults born in 1958. The researchers examined information on their job histories, and asthma and bronchitis symptoms at the ages of 7, 11, 16, 33 and 42. The researchers also assessed the participants' sensitivity to allergens and lung power at ages 42 and 45.

Using the Asthma Specific Job Exposure Matrix, the researchers calculated the participants' exposure to compounds with a known link to asthma, including respiratory irritants and high-risk agents, such as flour, enzymes, cleaning or disinfectant products, metal and metal fumes, and textile production.

After adjusting for various factors'including smoking'the investigators found that jobs were linked to 16% of adult-onset asthma cases among the group. But although the study found an association between work and asthma, it didn't prove that the occupations *caused* the onset of asthma. (However, causation isn't the only issue'here's a case in which workplace conditions didn't cause but aggravated a worker's pre-existing asthma.)

The study found that those exposed to:

- Low-risk agents were 20% more likely to develop asthma as an adult
- High-risk agents were 53% more likely to be diagnosed with asthma
- Both types of agents had a 34% greater risk of developing asthma.

In addition, the study found that asthma was strongly associated with 18 specific occupations'especially those that exposed workers to chemicals, such as cleaning jobs, farming, hairdressing and printing. For example, farming more

than quadrupled the risk for the condition, printing work tripled the risk and hairdressing doubled the risk.

In particular, the findings suggest that jobs involving cleaning or cleaning agents showed the strongest link to adult asthma.

Thus, if your workplace is in any of the high risk industries or your workers perform any of the work or are exposed to any of the agents with strong ties to asthma, make sure you take steps to protect them and maintain good indoor air quality, such as by providing adequate ventilation and appropriate respiratory PPE.