



Australian Government

Department of Health

Administrative report

National Guidance for doctors assessing workers exposed to respirable crystalline silica dust (with specific reference to the occupational respiratory diseases associated with engineered stone)

This Administrative report: National Guidance for doctors assessing workers exposed to respirable crystalline silica dust with specific reference to the occupational respiratory diseases associated with engineered stone (National Guidance) provides further information about the process of developing the National Guidance and associated documents.

The National Guidance is intended to be a general guide to support appropriate practice, subject to the medical practitioner's judgements and the patient's preferences in each individual case. It is not intended as a substitute for medical or legal advice. This document is based on expert opinion guided by the best evidence available at the time of its development and in consultation with key stakeholders. The Working Group acknowledges debate in the literature is evolving and that there remain limitations in the evidence available to inform the development of this document.

Background

In July 2019, the Australian Government established the National Dust Disease Taskforce (the Taskforce) in response to concerns about the increase in the incidence of silicosis linked to growth in the popularity of engineered stone. The Taskforce was established to inform a national approach to the prevention, early identification, control and management of occupational dust diseases in Australia, with a specific focus on the re-emergence of silicosis amongst workers in the engineered stone industry.⁽¹⁾

In its Interim Advice to the Minister for Health, the Taskforce recommended the development of national guidelines on an active case finding approach to identify people at risk from respirable crystalline silica (RCS) dust exposure in the workplace (Recommendation 4).⁽¹⁾ On 23 January 2020, the Minister for Health, the Hon Greg Hunt MP announced the Australian Government would accept all five recommendations from the Interim Advice.

In addition, the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP), the Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ), the Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (AFOEM), and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists (RANZCR) each called for the development of National Guidance for health assessment and surveillance of at-risk populations for silicosis.

National Guidance Working Group

The Taskforce established the National Guidance Working Group (the Working Group) in December 2020 to support the development and subsequent dissemination of the National Guidance.

The objectives of the Working Group were to provide expert input into the content of the National Guidance through liaison with respective networks and with consideration of available research and evidence, and current legislative and regulatory frameworks and guidance.

The Working Group was chaired by independent clinical expert, and Senior Consulting Physician, Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Dr Graeme Edwards who was also a member of the Taskforce.

The Working Group members were selected based on their areas of relevant expertise across respiratory and sleep medicine, thoracic medicine, radiology, environmental and occupational medicine, work health and safety, and occupational hygiene policy. The membership of the Working Group is listed at **Attachment A**.

Members of the Working Group and guests were required to declare any conflicts of interest as they arose, and if deemed appropriate, the person(s) were to be excused from the discussion. There were no declared conflicts of interest.

As part of their participation in the Working Group, members were required to sign a confidentiality and non-disclosure agreement with the Department.

The Working Group met six times between October 2020 and November 2021.

Stakeholder contributions

The development of the National Guidance was informed by several stakeholder consultations including a Research Workshop held 2 November 2020 and the National Consistent Guidelines Workshop held 19 March 2021.

Contributors to the National Guidance included the Australian Institute of Occupational Hygienists (AIOH), the Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ), The Royal Australian College of Physicians (RACP), Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists (RANZCR), Safe Work Australia, occupational hygienists, respiratory physicians, radiologists, non-clinicians, and representatives from Health and Work Health and Safety agencies in each jurisdiction.

Endorsing bodies include TSANZ, RACP, RANZCR, AIOH, the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM), and the Lung Foundation of Australia (LFA). The National Guidance is currently being considered by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) for approval as a clinical resource.

The National Guidance was finalised by the Working Group in January 2022. The final National Guidance and associated documents were approved by the Minister for Health and Aged Care, The Hon Greg Hunt on 8 February 2022.

References

1. The Department of Health. National Dust Disease Taskforce 2021 [cited 3 March 2021]. Available from: https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-nat-dust-disease-taskforce.htm?Open=&utm_source=health.gov.au&utm_medium=redirect&utm_campaign=digital_transformation&utm_content=dust.

Attachment A:

National Guidance Working Group Members

Member name	Organisational affiliations	Position	Role in the Working group
Professor Fraser Brims	Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, WA Curtin University Medical School Institute for Respiratory Health Western Australian Mesothelioma Registry National Dust Disease Taskforce	Consultant Respiratory Physician Director of Early Years Clinical Skills Deputy Director Chair	Independent clinical expert
Professor Dan Chambers	Prince Charles Hospital, QLD St Vincent's Private Hospital, QLD International Lung and Heart-lung Transplant Registry	Thoracic & Transplant Physician Associate Director	Independent clinical expert
Dr David Deller	Gold Coast Respiratory and Sleep Clinic, QLD	Respiratory and Sleep Physician	Independent clinical expert
Dr Graeme Edwards (Chair)	The Work Doctor, QLD NDDT	Consultant Physician	Independent clinical expert
Dr Ryan Hoy	Cabrini Malvern Medical Centre, VIC National Dust Disease Taskforce	Respiratory and Sleep Physician	Independent clinical expert
Dr Catherine Jones	I-Med Radiology Network	Specialist Chest Radiologist, Cardiac and Thoracic Imaging	Independent clinical expert
Dr Rosemarie Knight	The Work Doctor, QLD	Consultant Occupational and Environmental Physician	Independent clinical expert
Associate Professor Deborah Yates	St Vincent's Hospital, NSW University of NSW	Consultant Respiratory Physician	Independent clinical expert
Dr Catherine Kelaher	Office of Health Protection, Australian Government Department of Health	Principal Medical Advisor	Representative of the Medical Scientific and Advisory Unit, of the Office of Health Protection and Response, Department of Health.

Member name	Organisational affiliations	Position	Role in the Working group
Ms Jackii Shepherd (left after meeting 3)	Safe Work Australia	Director, Workplace Exposure Standards Review	National work health and safety policy perspective
Ms Katherine Stone	icare NSW- Dust Diseases Care	Head of Specialist Care Delivery	State-based policy perspective
Ms Nicola Wojcik	WorkSafe VIC	Manager, Strategic Health Programs, Innovation & Insights	State-based policy perspective