

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Lung health checks for mineral mine and quarry workers

### Overview of changes

**Q: What changes have been made?**

A: Changes to the Mining and Quarrying Safety and Health Regulation 2017 (the Regulation) that commenced on 1 September 2020 ensure that mine and quarry workers in Queensland undertake periodic respiratory health surveillance (lung health checks).

The changes require Site Senior Executives to arrange lung health checks for workers prior to them starting work in the mineral mine or quarry industry and then at least once every five years.

In addition, the changes also:

- specify the content of lung health checks;
- introduce exit lung health checks for workers leaving the industry; and
- provide a right to free lung health checks for retired and former workers.

**Q: Why are these changes required?**

A: Workers in Queensland's mineral mines and quarries can be exposed to a range of respiratory hazards, including mineral dust from development, production and processing as well as welding fumes and diesel exhaust emissions.

Work related exposure to these respiratory hazards can lead to a range of lung diseases, including silicosis, emphysema and lung cancer.

Lung damage is irreversible, however if the damage is detected early, the progress to more severe stages of disease can be prevented or slowed and may allow the worker to continue working in the industry.

**Q: Who will be impacted by the changes?**

A: The current general health surveillance requirements under the Regulation have not changed. The changes prescribe the content and frequency of lung health checks.

Site Senior Executives are still required to manage exposure to health hazards at a mine or quarry and arrange health surveillance of workers where necessary. Employers are still required to pay for the medical examinations and reasonable travel expenses.

**Q: Will every worker need a lung health check?**

A: Yes, the default position is that lung health checks are required for all workers. However, the Regulation recognises that some workers' current and previous exposure to respiratory hazards is so minimal that any risk can be managed without lung health checks.

If a Site Senior Executive is managing these minor risks without lung health checks, this must be documented by a risk assessment. This risk assessment must include an evaluation of current occupational exposure to respiratory hazards, the worker's previous work history and any relevant medical conditions the worker may have. Consideration should also be given to relevant information and data from, and practices in, other industries and mining operations.

**Q: Who is a worker?**

A: A worker is defined under the [Mining and Quarrying Safety and Health Act 1999](#) (the Act) as an individual who carries out work at a mine or quarry and includes: an employee of the operator; a contractor or an employee of the contractor; service provider or employee of a service provider. This includes family members and friends who may work on the site.

Working at a mine or quarry is defined as activities principally for, or in connection with, exploring for, winning, or winning and treating, minerals or hard rock (section 10 of the Act). Individuals not principally involved in operations such as cultural heritage and environmental assessors, delivery drivers or other similar visitors, would generally not be considered workers for the purposes of needing a lung health check. Fossicking on the ground's surface or digging with a hand tool are also not considered workers for these purposes.

If in doubt, undertake a risk assessment as discussed above. More information is provided in *QGL04 Guideline for respiratory health surveillance of workers in Queensland mineral mines and quarries* available from

[www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/mining-energy-water/resources/safety-health/mining/legislation-standards/recognised-standards](http://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/mining-energy-water/resources/safety-health/mining/legislation-standards/recognised-standards)

**Q: Will a lung health check be required each time a worker changes site or employer?**

A: No, however Site Senior Executives in consultation with an Appropriate Doctor should assess the risk from any change in exposure to respiratory hazards arising from a worker's change in site, job or employer.

If a worker had previously undertaken lung health checks, the presumption is that the worker should continue to have their lung health checked regularly.

**Q: How do I arrange and organise the lung health check for my workers?**

A: Discuss your requirements with an Appropriate Doctor, as the Regulation requires lung health checks to be undertaken or supervised by an Appropriate Doctor.

The required qualification and standards for an Appropriate Doctor and medical providers are detailed in *QGL04 Guideline for respiratory health surveillance of workers in Queensland mineral mines and quarries*.

Mine and quarry operators can use doctors and medical providers who are registered with Resources Safety and Health Queensland. They are considered to have adequate qualifications and experience to achieve an acceptable level of risk when undertaking the lung health check.

The register of doctors and medical providers is available from

<https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/mining-energy-water/resources/safety-health/mining/medicals/register-providers>

## The new requirements

**Q: What is included in a lung health check?**

A: A lung health check consists of the following examinations:

- chest examination – a physical examination of the chest that includes listening to the lungs;
- chest X-ray – that is read by at least two qualified radiologists to international standards;

- lung function test (spirometry) – a standard test used to detect conditions that affect lung function. Workers will be required to breathe forcefully into a machine called a spirometer. The doctor will compare the results with previous results if available; and
- any examination deemed necessary by an Appropriate Doctor to support the early detection of injury or illness to the person’s respiratory system e.g. high resolution computed tomography scan.

The standards for the examinations are provided in *QGL04 Guideline for respiratory health surveillance of workers in Queensland mineral mines and quarries*.

**Q: Can any medical provider undertake a lung health check?**

A: Examinations are to be completed by an appropriately qualified medical provider. The required qualification and standards for providers are detailed in *QGL04 Guideline for respiratory health surveillance of workers in Queensland mineral mines and quarries*.

Mine and quarry operators can use doctors and medical providers who are registered with Resources Safety and Health Queensland. They are considered to have adequate qualifications and experience to achieve an acceptable level of risk when undertaking the lung health check.

Only an Appropriate Doctor can complete and sign the health surveillance report.

**Q: How do I find out which medical providers are approved?**

A: An online register is available on the Resources Safety and Health Queensland’s website and can be found by searching ‘register of doctors and medical providers’.

<https://www.rshq.qld.gov.au/business/mining/safety/registered-medical-search>.

**Q: Who can undertake the further reading of chest X-rays?**

A: Radiology providers that Resources Safety and Health Queensland has validated to deliver further reading services are notified on Resources Safety and Health Queensland’s website and noted in the recommended template respiratory health surveillance examination form.

The specific requirements are detailed in *QGL04 Guideline for respiratory health surveillance of workers in Queensland mineral mines and quarries*.

Other providers can undertake these functions if they meet the requirements set out in the Guideline.

**Q: Can an Appropriate Doctor request medical records held under the Coal Mine Workers’ Health Scheme (the Scheme)?**

A: Yes, however the Appropriate Doctor must have the worker’s consent. The records are stored by Resources Safety and Health Queensland’s Health Surveillance Unit. The Health Surveillance Unit can be contacted on (07) 3818 5420 or HSU@rshq.qld.gov.au or complete and return the consent form to HSU.

The form can be downloaded from

[https://www.rshq.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/1489659/release-of-coal-mine-workers-health-records-request-form.pdf](https://www.rshq.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1489659/release-of-coal-mine-workers-health-records-request-form.pdf).

## Costs

**Q: What are the costs for workers?**

A: None.

The employer is responsible for the cost of health surveillance, including lung health checks. This includes paying for the medical examinations, follow-up tests, specialist consultations and reports, and any reasonable associated travel expenses.

Resources Safety and Health Queensland arranges and pays for retired and former workers including any reasonable associated travel expenses.

**Q: How much do these medicals cost?**

A: The cost of the minimum required screening examinations can vary between providers but is generally in the order of about \$700. If abnormalities are identified, the approximate cost of additional examinations can be around \$1,300 – depending on the test or consultation needed and price variations between providers.

## Record keeping

**Q: How are findings of the examinations recorded?**

A: The medical records and clinical results of the lung health check should be documented and a report must be produced that describes the outcome. It is recommended that these are documented in separate forms.

Resources Safety and Health Queensland has developed template forms that align with the requirements of the Regulation and *QGL04 Guideline for respiratory health surveillance of workers in Queensland mineral mines and quarries*:

- *Respiratory health surveillance medical examination form* to record the clinical findings from the lung health check and associated medical records, and
- *Health surveillance report* is completed by the Appropriate Doctor to record information about any effects on a worker's health related to exposure to a respiratory hazard at a mine or quarry and the need, if any, for remedial action.

The health surveillance report must not include any medical records, such as the examination form. A copy of this report must be provided to the Site Senior Executive and the worker.

Both forms are available from: [www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/mining-energy-water/resources/safety-health/mining/legislation-standards/recognised-standards](http://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/mining-energy-water/resources/safety-health/mining/legislation-standards/recognised-standards)

**Q: How long are the records to be stored?**

A: Site Senior Executives must ensure that health surveillance reports, for a hazard with a cumulative or delayed effect, are kept for 30 years.

If a mine or quarry ceases operation, the Site Senior Executive must ask for and comply with the directions from the CEO of Resources Safety and Health Queensland.

**Q: Do I need to send a copy of the form to Resources Safety and Health Queensland?**

A: No. The Site Senior Executive and Appropriate Doctor are not required to provide a copy of either form to Resources Safety and Health Queensland.

However, if a prescribed disease is detected, the Site Senior Executive must report it to Resources Safety and Health Queensland. Further information on how to report diseases is available here <https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/mining-energy-water/resources/minerals-coal/reports-notice/safety-health-mineral>

**Q: What measures will be in place to protect workers' medical information?**

A: The current arrangements regarding the confidentiality of workers' medical information are not impacted. The Appropriate Doctor will provide a report on the outcome of the lung health check to the Site Senior Executive, the worker, and with the consent of the worker to another doctor. The Appropriate Doctor will only be able to provide a medical record if specifically requested by the Site Senior Executive with the consent of the worker.

## Delaying an examination

**Q: When might an Appropriate Doctor delay an examination?**

A: In exceptional circumstances, an Appropriate Doctor has the discretion to delay an examination for up to 12 months. The Appropriate Doctor will consider the risks associated with the examination against the risks of not doing the examination.

This provision addresses potential situations where there is a health risk to the worker associated with the examination that outweighs the risk to the worker or co-workers of delaying the examination.

For example, where a worker is pregnant, the chest X-ray examination could be performed up to 12 months after the due date for the respiratory health surveillance, to minimise any risk to an unborn child.

**Q: Where should the Appropriate Doctor note delaying one or more examinations?**

A: The Appropriate Doctor should record the medical examination that is being delayed on the health surveillance report and explain the rationale for delaying the examination in the medical record.

**Q: How long can an examination be delayed?**

A: An examination may be delayed up to one year after the date when the examination was required.

**Q: If an examination is delayed, how does that impact the timing of the next lung health check?**

A: The date of the lung health check is still considered to be the date when the examinations should have been carried out were it not delayed.

For example, if the medical examination of a worker is completed on 5 September 2020 but the chest X-ray is delayed until May the following year, the date of the lung health check is the 5 September 2020. The next full lung health check is then due on or before 5 September 2025.

## Additional resources

**Q: Where can I find more information about mine dust lung disease?**

A: The Miners' Health Matters website has a range of educational videos and further information about types of disease, exposure controls, health surveillance and support for workers: [www.rshq.qld.gov.au/miners-health-matters](http://www.rshq.qld.gov.au/miners-health-matters).

**Q: What additional support is there for current and former workers?**

A: The confidential Mine Dust Health Support Service can help current and former workers, and their families and representatives, understanding their rights, the health surveillance process, workers' compensation and ongoing support.

The Mine Dust Health Support Service can also help retired and former workers to access free lung health checks paid for by Resources Safety and Health Queensland.

The service can be contacted by phone on 1300 445 715 or email: [info@minedusthealthsupport.com](mailto:info@minedusthealthsupport.com).

**Q: Is there further guidance and template forms?**

A: Template forms and statutory guidance is available from [www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/mining-energy-water/resources/safety-health/mining/legislation-standards/recognised-standards](http://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/mining-energy-water/resources/safety-health/mining/legislation-standards/recognised-standards)

**Resources Safety and Health Queensland**

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