Patient Fact Sheet

SILICOSIS INFORMATION SHEET

What is Silicosis?

Silicosis is an incurable lung disease caused by the inhalation of very fine silica (sand) dust. Silicosis causes inflammation and scar tissue in the lungs. There has been increased media attention for the disease as many workers are developing silicosis and other silica dust diseases, often with only short-term exposure.

Who is at risk?

Workers in areas such as mining and construction are often at higher risk. There is also a current wave of silicosis cases amongst those employed in stone masonry environments, as many workers have been exposed to silica dust, through cutting or fitting engineered stone, commonly used in kitchen and bathroom benchtops.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of silicosis can include a nagging cough, shortness of breath or chest pain. Silicosis can be prevented but there is no known cure. Once detected, treatments can help manage the symptoms in consultation with a medical professional. Therefore detection is vital through high quality imaging and diagnostic reporting services.

How can workers be protected?

It is vital to ensure the wellbeing of workers, by establishing safe work practices and to detect silicosis accurately and early in those affected. Employers have a duty to provide a safe working environment and measures should be implemented to minimise any risks to worker health.

Silicosis and stone masonry

Manufactured stone contains up to 95% crystalline silica while natural stone such as marble or granite contains between 5 to 50% crystalline (WorkCover Queensland, 2018). Silicosis is an aggressive and incurable lung disease which results from breathing in this crystalline dust.

Apex Radiology Occupational Imaging Services:

At Apex Radiology we provide high quality imaging services for occupational workers. Our silicosis scanning includes Chest x-ray and Low dose CT chest scans, meeting industry requirements.

Detection guidelines from RANZCR:

“The wellbeing of at risk workers is paramount and it is vital that screening programs detect silicosis accurately and early to ensure that workers are protected. RANZCR recommends that CT is the primary imaging modality for screening exposed workers as it can detect disease earlier and with greater accuracy” (The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists, October 2019).

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