



NUT 2017 Asbestos Survey Report

In March 2017, the NUT invited members to complete a short online survey about asbestos management in their school. The results confirmed the NUT's concerns that teachers and school staff are not being routinely informed whether their school contains asbestos and where it is located. This means that staff and pupils continue to be at risk of exposure to asbestos while in schools. There was overwhelming support for a Government strategy for the phased removal of all asbestos from schools and the NUT will continue to campaign for the Government to commit to this.

- **Shockingly, nearly 50% of all respondents had not been told whether their school contains asbestos.** This is concerning given that the majority of schools (86%) do contain asbestos. Less than 5% of respondents had been told that their school did not contain asbestos, therefore the majority of respondents either knew that asbestos was present in their school, or had not been told either way.

Of the 46% respondents who had been told that their school contained asbestos:

- Half had not been told where the asbestos was located. If staff are not told whether their school contains asbestos, and where this asbestos is located, they cannot take steps to avoid disturbing it and they are at risk of exposure.
- Nearly 75% said that the asbestos was in locations accessible to children and staff, such as floors, ceilings, window frames. Schools are unlike the majority of other workplaces in that majority of their occupants are children, who engage in normal, but boisterous behaviours, that are likely to disturb asbestos.
- Three quarters said that staff had not been provided with asbestos awareness training.
- Only 2 per cent of respondents said that parents had been given information about the presence of asbestos in the school.
- The majority of respondents (85%) had not been shown their school's asbestos management plan.
- Nearly a quarter were aware of incidents of potential asbestos exposure in their school.

All respondents were asked the following questions:

- Less than a quarter of all respondents were aware that teachers are increasingly dying from mesothelioma, a cancer linked exclusively to asbestos exposure.
- Nearly all respondents (92%) were unaware that Britain has the highest mesothelioma rate in the world.

- Similarly, 87% of respondents were unaware that because of the long latency periods associated with mesothelioma, children are particularly at risk from exposure to asbestos.
- 90% were unaware that the Health and Safety Executive does not routinely inspect schools to check asbestos management.
- Nearly all respondents (96%) agreed that there should be a long term Government strategy for the phased removal of all asbestos in schools by 2028.
- Nearly half of all respondents did not know if World War One or Two gas masks had been worn or handled in their school.
- It is even more shocking that nearly 100 respondents said that such gas masks were still worn or handled in their school, with some respondents reporting that they had been used recently on school visits.

Comments from respondents about asbestos management in their school

While some respondents highlighted good practice in asbestos management, the majority of comments were indicative of widespread problems. For instance, there were numerous reports of staff and pupils being exposed to asbestos in schools, of staff not being told about the presence of asbestos and inappropriately lax responses when asbestos is discovered.

Below are some examples:

Staff are not told whether the school contains asbestos and where it is located:

I know there is asbestos in our mobile classroom because of chance discussions with the maintenance staff but I have not been officially told by school despite teaching in those rooms regularly. I am very concerned about my exposure to it.

Staff find out about asbestos from longer serving members of staff rather than through the induction period. There is nothing formally in place to tell new staff about it.

We have only recently been made aware of where there is asbestos in school because of an incident regarding it, otherwise I hadn't been informed in the 5 years of working in the school.

There is asbestos in our school but I only know this after having seen a notice on a wall. No one has ever informed me directly and I am not aware of any procedures in place. Recently our school had a leak that resulted in part of the ceiling being damaged and needing repair, this was in one of the asbestos areas. At no point was any member of staff told of the potential dangers.

School will not tell me if there is asbestos in my classroom. There are big chunks of plaster missing out of the walls. Children pick at this during lessons.

Examples of asbestos exposure incidents affecting staff and pupils:

Contractors came in to work in an area known to have asbestos, they were masked and suited and started work while children were in the same room unprotected waiting for a bus. It was reported and they were sacked.

Children regularly punch holes in walls and dig holes in plaster covering the asbestos.

My classroom ceiling was splitting and cracking for over 4 years until part of it crumbled and a portion finally came away collapsing on the pupils.

Asbestos in a toilet used by staff and sometimes used by an SEN pupil.

Apparently the lids of the children's toilets have asbestos in. They have fallen off the cistern on more than one occasion...once I picked the lid up out of the cistern and after I was told it contained asbestos.

Chair was thrown through the wall by a pupil. Wall was insulated with asbestos.

The whole tower block was exposed to asbestos. Pupils were sent home for the day while workers came in to tape over the exposed areas.

Every now and then asbestos is revealed when furniture, panelling, pipework, electrical work is undertaken. Most recently, some was discovered in an area where pupils store their bags before entering the dining hall.

Just the other day a colleague of mine said 'I can't hang work from the ceilings; every time I touch a ceiling tile asbestos falls on me'.

Asbestos exposure incidents are often not dealt with appropriately, or there is a lack of understanding of the risks involved:

Asbestos was found in my DT workshop last week and we were not allowed to enter for 30 minutes while it was covered up with tape!

Asbestos tile fell off the classroom wall, the tile was broken. The tiles were removed one weekend by a specialist team but none of the dust etc was cleared away. The head asked the cleaner to give it a quick Hoover on the Monday morning when the class teacher noticed it had not been cleared away properly.

During BSF I raised concerns that I and my team were exposed to asbestos. These were rebuffed.

Asbestos management seems very lax and if anyone raises a concern or issues it is either laughed at by the head or we are told off for mentioning it.

My fume cupboard is lined with asbestos and I only found out last year. I asked for it to be assessed and was at first refused, until the caretaker noticed it had a safety notice stapled into it. The county came and coated it with a paint that didn't bond, it flaked off.

I was given 2 minutes' notice to vacate my room during a school day even though I later discovered (by reading the most recent asbestos report) that the problem had been uncovered several weeks before.

Asbestos has been found twice next to and in my teaching room. I have raised concerns about it but do not feel my concerns have been taken seriously and have not been fully informed of the risks. The first time I was left teaching in my room with only a blue sheet protecting me and my class from exposure. I raised concerns at the time, especially because I was pregnant, but I was told there was no risk to mine or the children's health.

Lack of capital funding limits schools' resources to remove asbestos:

There is asbestos under the carpet in my classroom but the school cannot afford to have it removed despite repeated requests.

The school has said they won't do anything with it because of the cost to remove it. The school cannot afford to remove it.

Reports of teachers and school staff contracting mesothelioma:

...with three ex-members of staff (two consecutive heads of science and one cleaner) dead or dying from mesothelioma, there is obviously a concern among long-serving staff about historical exposure to asbestos.

Two ex-staff (one dead; not sure about the other) with confirmed mesothelioma. One further member of staff believed to have died from mesothelioma.

My sister died of mesothelioma in January last year after 30 years teaching in an old village primary school.

A teacher at my school died 10 years ago at the age of 58 from abdominal mesothelioma – due to exposure earlier in her career.