

# Sumas Mountain / Swift Creek Asbestos Cluster Investigation

## 2021 Update Summary

Since 2008, the Washington State Department of Health has been investigating possible health effects from exposure to naturally occurring asbestos in the Swift Creek and Sumas River drainage area. We compared the rate of asbestos-related diseases among people living in the area with rates for Washington State and Whatcom County. In 2021, we reviewed additional years of data to update our recommendations.

## What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a group of minerals found in rocks and soil. When asbestos-containing rocks and soil are disturbed, asbestos is released into the air. Breathing in asbestos puts people at risk of getting sick.

Learn more about asbestos at [atsdr.cdc.gov/asbestos/](https://atsdr.cdc.gov/asbestos/).

## Why are we concerned?

Breathing in asbestos may cause health problems like:

- Lung and bronchial cancer
- Mesothelioma (cancer of the linings of the lungs and abdomen)
- Asbestosis (scarring of lung tissue)

Breathing in asbestos does not always mean you will get sick. The risk of getting sick depends on many factors, like how much, how often, and how long a person is exposed to asbestos.

# What did we find?

Our findings suggest that asbestos in the Swift Creek and Sumas River area **has not contributed to an increase in asbestos-related diseases** among people living in the area. However, these conclusions are based on available data and current investigation methods, both of which have limitations. [Read our full report for more information.](#)

# What should residents do?

Continue to limit or avoid exposure to asbestos in the area. This includes areas along Swift Creek and Sumas River, or where flooding may have carried asbestos-containing soil. Everyday activities that stir up dust in asbestos-containing soil puts you at risk of breathing in asbestos.

Take the following steps to limit exposure to asbestos:

## Outside

- Walk, run, bike, drive, and ride horses only on paved trails.
- Play only in outdoor areas with a ground covering such as wood chips, mulch, sand, pea gravel, grass, asphalt, shredded rubber, or rubber mats.
- Drive slowly over unpaved roads.

## At home

- Remove shoes before entering your home to avoid tracking in dirt.
- Use doormats to lower the amount of dirt that is tracked into the home.
- Keep windows and doors closed on windy days and during nearby construction.
- Use a wet rag instead of a dry rag or duster to dust.
- Use a wet mop on non-carpeted floors.
- Vacuum your carpet often using a vacuum with a high efficiency HEPA filter.



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