Carcinogens

We can be exposed to carcinogens in dust, liquid, gas, waves or other forms. They can be colourless, odourless and invisible. See the table below for examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROUTES INTO THE BODY</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
<th>MEANS OF PREVENTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Inhalation</td>
<td>Wood dust</td>
<td>Local exhaust ventilation • Respiratory protection</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Silica dust in drywall compound</td>
<td>Local exhaust ventilation • Working methods • Respiratory protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asbestos fibres in materials handled</td>
<td>Working methods • Protective clothing • Respiratory protection • Personal hygiene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fumes from stripping furniture</td>
<td>Substitution • Local exhaust ventilation • Working methods • Respiratory protection • Appropriate gloves</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diesel engine exhaust</td>
<td>Mechanical maintenance • Local exhaust ventilation • General ventilation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dust and fumes when plating metal</td>
<td>Local exhaust ventilation • Working methods • Respiratory protection • Appropriate gloves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absorption through skin</td>
<td>Solvents used for cleaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skin contact</td>
<td>Hepatitis B or C virus when handling contaminated material</td>
<td>Vaccination • Working methods • Appropriate gloves</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hand contact with tar or soot</td>
<td>Working methods • Appropriate gloves • Personal hygiene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct exposure</td>
<td>Solar radiation outdoors</td>
<td>Light-coloured, long-sleeved clothing • Hat • Work schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X-Rays for medical, paramedical and industrial applications</td>
<td>Working methods • Physical barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingestion</td>
<td>Handling food or cigarette with dirty hands</td>
<td>Working methods • Personal hygiene</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even very low exposure can increase the risk of cancer. We spend an average of 40 hours a week at work for 30 or 40 years. **We should reduce our exposure as much as possible.**

The most common types of occupational cancer are lung, bladder and skin cancer.


To know which carcinogens are covered by the Regulation respecting occupational health and safety, see its Schedule I.
How to identify carcinogens

✓ Product labels
WHMIS pictograms on labels are the first indication of a hazard.

✓ Safety data sheets (material safety data sheets)
The safety data sheet for each chemical product provides information on its health effects and how to protect yourself. The SDS must be available in the workplace and can also be found on the manufacturer’s website.

✓ Signage
Signs are a way of warning workers about working conditions or areas that could be hazardous to their health and about mandatory protective measures.

Preventive measures

Under the Regulation respecting occupational health and safety, worker exposure to substances having a known or suspected carcinogenic effect on humans must be reduced to a minimum.

In addition to taking preventive measures, employers must train and inform workers about
• the health effects of exposure to carcinogens and
• how to reduce or eliminate exposure.

BEST PRACTICES

Remain vigilant at work Read product labels and pictograms; report any accidental spill.

Make proper use of the personal protective equipment your employer must provide Wear appropriate work clothing and gloves, conduct respiratory protective equipment seal and fit testing and replace cartridges as recommended.

Develop safe habits Don’t eat or drink at your workstations; wash your hands and face, especially before eating.

Leave work hazards... at work Don’t take work overalls home; wash hands before leaving work.

To conclude

The prevention officer or health and safety committee in your workplace can answer any questions you may have. You can also talk to your supervisor or trade union or get in touch with the:

Commission de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CSST)
www.csst.qc.ca/nous_joindre/Pages/repertoire_general.aspx Toll-free: 1-866-302-CSST (2778)

CSST’s toxicological index www.reptox.csst.qc.ca

Public occupational health team www.santeautravail.qc.ca

To print this document or for further reading: F. Labrèche et al., Are there carcinogens in your workplace? It’s time to act!, RG-796, 14 p.
www.irsst.qc.ca/en/-irsst-publication-are-there-carcinogens-in-your-workplace-rg-796.html

Ce feuillet est également disponible en français : www.irsst.qc.ca/-publication-irsst-y-a-t-il-des-cancerogenes-dans-votre-milieu-de-travail-rg-790.html

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