

(such as on weekends or holidays), you may have WEA. You may also notice other symptoms related to being at work, such as runny nose, eye or throat irritation, or a skin rash. Symptoms may continue even after you end your workday. You may find you need to use your rescue inhaler such as albuterol or levalbuterol more at or after being at work.

How is work-exacerbated asthma diagnosed?

If you work and your asthma symptoms have worsened and/or you are using your asthma rescue inhaler more frequently, it is important that you tell your healthcare provider about your work and asthma symptoms. You should tell your healthcare provider what kind of work you do, how long you have been working there, and whether there have been any changes in your workplace, such as construction, renovations, water damage, or the use of new products. You should also tell your healthcare provider if your asthma symptoms worsen at work and/or improve away from work, and if you suspect that some particular substance(s), location, or activity at work is making your asthma worse. Your healthcare provider may give you a peak flow meter and diary to measure and record your breathing and asthma symptoms. You should also record whether or not you are at work, and when you use your rescue inhaler. You can get more information about substances you work with that you think may be a problem by asking for a copy of the Safety Data Sheets (SDS) from your employer.

How is work-exacerbated asthma managed?

If your healthcare provider suspects WEA, it is important that changes are made to reduce asthma triggers at your work. Your healthcare provider will work with you to make any changes in your asthma medicine to try to improve your asthma care. Changes that can reduce workplace triggers include:

- improving the ventilation (fresh air exchange),
- using less irritating substances,
- fixing water leaks,
- changing your work assignment,
- or wearing a protective mask for certain tasks.

In the United States, the national US Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) states that employers have a legal obligation to try to make “reasonable accommodation” for their employees. That means employers must make adjustments to the workplace

in order to keep someone employed, unless the changes would be “unreasonable.” If you have problems with your employer not helping to address your exposure concern, you can file a complaint to the US Department of Justice (see https://www.ada.gov/filing_complaint.htm). Workers should also be counseled about their rights and benefits, including workers’ compensation benefits.

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Rx Action Steps

- ✓ If you have asthma and are having trouble with symptoms at work, pay attention to what you are exposed to and talk to your healthcare provider
- ✓ Make sure you are taking your asthma medications correctly and have a rescue inhaler available.
- ✓ Work with your healthcare provider to figure out if there are triggers that can be avoided or controlled at work and at home.
- ✓ If you suspect a substance you work with on the job, ask if there is a Safety Data Sheet (SDS) that describes its safety and possible exposure risks.

Healthcare Provider’s Contact Number:

Resources:

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/asthma/default.html>

US Department of Justice

Americans with Disabilities Act

www.ada.gov

American Lung Association

<http://www.lung.org/lung-disease/asthma/creating-asthma-friendly-environments/asthma-in-the-workplace/guide-to-controlling-asthma-at-work.html>

American Thoracic Society

<http://www.thoracic.org/statements/resources/eold/an-official-ats-statement-work-exacerbated-asthma.pdf>

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