

NSW Coal Industry Respiratory Health Standard

This standard was the first in a series of health standards to be developed specifically for the NSW coal industry.



What are health standards?

Health standards are practical, risk-based assessment tools for making medical determinations based on job role requirements and assessed risk. They detail the follow-up requirements and medical management for certain health conditions. They also assist in identifying any job adjustments to ensure coal mine workers can work safely and effectively.

Purpose of the Respiratory Health Standard

The Respiratory Health Standard is designed to:

- assess whether a coal mine worker has adequate lung function to undertake their proposed role
- ensure that coal mine workers with identified lung abnormalities are restricted from potentially harmful exposures (as appropriate) and are monitored to minimise potential ongoing harm
- ensure coal mine workers who are exposed to respiratory hazards other than coal mine dust are appropriately managed and monitored.

Why is a Respiratory Health Standard important for coal mine workers?

Coal mining produces coal dust and dusts from other minerals, including silica. Repeated exposure to coal mine dust can put coal mine workers at risk of developing coal mine dust lung diseases (CMDLD).

It is important to detect, identify, and diagnose any potential CMDLD as early as possible to enable better treatment options and protect against any further damage to the lungs.

The Respiratory Health Standard provides information to Order 43 approved medical practitioners to make consistent, evidence-based clinical decisions regarding respiratory health.

Additional testing and assessments under the Respiratory Health Standard

Coal mine workers may be asked to complete additional testing as part of their Order 43 health assessment to assess their respiratory health and diagnose any potential respiratory conditions.

These may include:

- **Bronchodilator responsiveness testing**
A spirometry test that involves Ventolin to check if lung function improves compared to earlier spirometry.
- **Complex lung function testing**
Provides a more comprehensive evaluation of lung function. A spirometry test is completed first, then a second test uses medical-grade gas to measure the lung's ability to transfer oxygen into the bloodstream.
- **High-resolution computed tomography**
A medical imaging scan that produces a much clearer and detailed image of the chest, including the lungs and heart.
- **Respiratory physician referral**
If further assessments are required to diagnose a lung condition, coal mine workers may be referred to a respiratory physician.

What if a coal mine worker is diagnosed with a CMDLD or other respiratory condition?

Coal mine workers who are diagnosed with an identified respiratory condition may need to have reduced exposure to coal mine dust to preserve their respiratory (lung) function.

The Order 43 approved medical practitioner may need to consider the coal mine worker's capacity to perform their current role and may apply dust restrictions to the coal mine worker's health assessment certificate.