

Shining a light on industrial disease



It is a sad and well-reported fact that POA members can, and are, injured during the course of their duties. As the POA's legal partners, Thompsons is committed to supporting members to secure compensation for accidents and injuries inside and outside of work. In addition to personal injury services for slips and trips, injuries caused as the result of an assault and road traffic accidents, POA members can also access free legal support if they fall victim to an industrial disease or illness.

Industrial diseases are conditions or illnesses caused by exposure to dangerous substances or unsafe conditions in the workplace. In this pull-out, we shine a light on common types of industrial diseases and explain how POA members can access the right support and compensation if they've been affected.

Types of industrial disease

– what you need to know

Tuberculosis (“TB”)

The symptoms of TB can develop slowly and can take weeks or months to appear after being first infected. ‘Active TB’ is when symptoms of the infection – such as a lack of appetite / weight loss, night sweats, fatigue, headaches, fever or a persistent cough – manifest. ‘Latent TB’ is when someone has been infected but does not display any symptoms.

How might POA members be put at risk?

TB is an airborne infection that is caused by bacteria. It most commonly affects the lungs and is transmitted from person to person by coughing or sneezing. There are specific government guidelines for prison healthcare teams and the risk of catching TB is generally considered small however, it can spread quickly among people living in close quarters – putting POA members at risk of contracting what can be a deadly condition.

Latex allergies

Latex allergy is an allergy to proteins that are present in natural rubber or to the chemicals used in processing the rubber. Skin irritation and asthma are common symptoms of the allergy.

How might POA members be put at risk?

When a person is exposed regularly to latex, for example by wearing latex gloves, they may become hypersensitive to it and steps will need to be taken to remove contact with the irritant from their work.

Work-related dermatitis

Work-related eczema (or dermatitis) can occur as a result of contact with an irritant such as glue, cleaning products or other chemicals.

How might POA members be put at risk?

A person who comes into contact with dust or chemicals at work without the proper protective clothing may go on to develop dermatitis or eczema on the exposed body parts, such as the face and hands.

Industrial deafness

Industrial deafness (also known as occupational deafness or noise-induced hearing loss) is a deterioration of a person’s hearing over a prolonged period of time.

How might POA members be put at risk?

Industrial deafness can occur as a result of exposure to excessive levels of noise at work for extended periods of time.

Asbestos-related diseases including mesothelioma

Asbestos is the greatest single cause of work-related deaths in the UK. If you have been diagnosed with an asbestos-related illness you should seek legal advice from Thompsons straight away; together they can work with you and your family to build a case for compensation and financial security.

Mesothelioma is a fatal form of cancer caused by exposure to asbestos. The symptoms of asbestos related illnesses can take a long time to appear, between 10 and 40 years after exposure has ceased, sometimes longer. Many people suffering now were exposed to asbestos in the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

Pleural thickening can be caused by exposure to asbestos but may not develop until many decades after a person was exposed to asbestos. Symptoms of pleural thickening include shortness of breath and tightness around the chest.

Asbestosis is a lung disease commonly caused by excessive and prolonged periods of exposure to asbestos. The exposure causes scarring and thickening of lung tissues. The main symptom of asbestosis is shortness of breath, however other symptoms include chest pain, tightness around the chest, or an unexplained cough.

How might POA members be put at risk?

The use of asbestos was banned in 1999 however it is still present in many public buildings, including HM Prisons, built or refurbished before that date. Commonly used as insulation or as a defence against fire damage, asbestos becomes toxic when dust particles become airborne.

Needlestick injury

Needlestick injury is the term used to describe an accident where a person's skin is accidentally punctured by a hypodermic needle or sharp medical device such as a scalpel.

In addition to the physical trauma caused by a needlestick injury, including bleeding, swelling and tenderness combined with the risk of bacterial infection, they also have the added concern of whether they will have contracted a blood-borne virus.

How might POA members be put at risk?

Most needlestick injuries and sharps injuries are caused by needles and sharps which have been carelessly discarded or disposed of into the wrong type of refuse container. POA members are more at risk of needlestick injuries due to the operational duties of searching offenders, property and accommodation.

Is it difficult to make a claim?

Claims involving industrial diseases are often started years if not decades after exposure to a workplace hazard took place. You will need an expert solicitor who specialises in these types of claims in order to build a strong evidence-based case. High street solicitors often won't have the experience needed to secure the right levels of compensation or know the experts to use who can draw links between the exposure and your employment, but Thompsons has dedicated teams who do.

What are the time limits for making an industrial disease or illness claim?

Normally it is three years from the date you were diagnosed or the date you could reasonably have known that your condition was work related, but that is sometimes difficult to pin point. To guarantee the best chances of success, contact Thompsons as soon as possible after receiving a diagnosis to discuss whether you have a case. We can explain what steps to take and whether a compensation claim will be possible.

Why Thompsons?

Thompsons will only ever act for the injured or mistreated union member, never for insurance companies or employers – they are 100% on your side and committed to your case. Our team of expert lawyers have run the test cases that established the law in most areas of disease litigation and have been using it ever since. We fight harder and smarter to secure the best possible outcome for our clients in the shortest possible time by drawing on our unparalleled experience of running and winning industrial injury compensation claims.

“My solicitor at Thompsons was excellent. I always felt more confident and had a better understanding of the situation after my discussions with her. I would highly recommend Thompsons to others.”

POA member

“I was extremely happy with the support and guidance I have received from my solicitor and cannot fault Thompsons Solicitors in any way.”

POA member

Contact the POA legal services direct on: **0800 578 7515**
www.thompsonstradeunion.law/trade-unions/poa

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