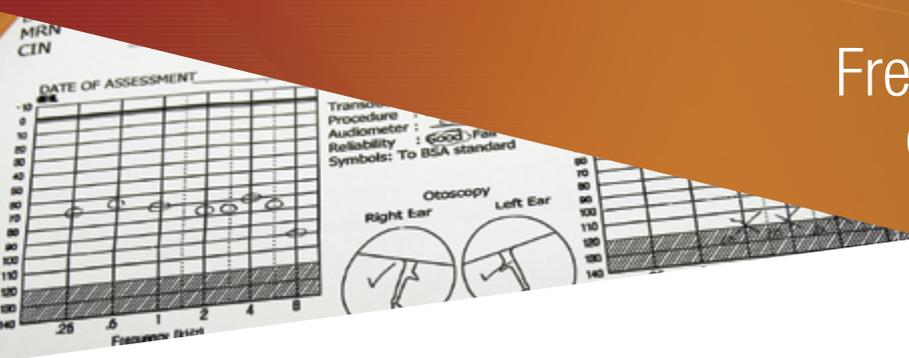




Frequently asked questions on health surveillance of mine workers



1. What is health surveillance?

The mine employee health surveillance system commenced in 1996 under the Mines Safety and Inspection Regulations 1995 to:

- assess the health status of all mining industry employees on a regular basis
- analyse the data collected to detect adverse health effects at the earliest opportunity
- enable appropriate and timely corrective action to be taken in order to safeguard the health and wellbeing of mining industry employees
- provide data for future epidemiological studies.

2. What were MineHealth assessments?

Health assessments were conducted when a worker entered the Western Australian mining industry, and then periodically or as directed. The health assessment comprised:

- a work history
- a respiratory questionnaire
- a lung function test
- an audiometric (hearing) test
- in some cases, a chest x-ray.

The MineHealth database records the results of the initial and periodic health assessments (known as MineHealth assessments).

3. Why are Minehealth assessments no longer required?

Two comprehensive epidemiological studies of the database conducted in 2010 and 2012 showed that these assessments neither prevented nor detected ill health at an early stage.

The cessation of the MineHealth system on 12 January 2013 allows the industry to apply a more risk-based approach to health surveillance. Employers are responsible for identifying the hazards in their workplaces, assessing the risks to workers' health and wellbeing, and eliminating or mitigating those risks.

4. How will we know that workers' health is not being compromised by this change?

The requirements to report occupational diseases, and undertake specified health assessments and biological monitoring will remain in Part 3 of the regulations.

Biological monitoring refers to medical tests that may be useful in the assessment and management of the risks of exposures to hazardous substances, such as blood lead tests for those who work with or transport lead.

The Department of Mines and Petroleum also continues to monitor the health of the mining workforce through the comprehensive personal monitoring program required for workplace contaminants (known as CONTAM). The

CONTAM system is used to assess the efficiency of management programs aimed at controlling dust and other airborne contaminants.

In addition, the Department monitors the health of the mining workforce through site inspections and audits.

5. I am intending to work in the mining industry. Am I still required to have a MineHealth assessment?

No, the requirement for MineHealth assessments ceased on 12 January 2013. However, some mining companies may still require you to undertake a pre-employment health assessment.

You may also be required to undertake a WorkCover WA baseline hearing test within 12 months of commencing employment, depending on where you are working on the mine site.

6. I'm an employer. Do I need to undertake initial health assessments on new employees, or periodic health assessments on existing employees?

No, the requirement for both initial health assessments (regulation 3.25) and periodic health assessments (regulation 3.26) ceased on 12 January 2013.

No new or periodic health assessments should be commenced on or after 12 January 2013. This applies to both mine employees and any contractors who may work on mine sites.

7. Some of my new and existing employees are part way through a MineHealth assessment. What should I do?

Health assessments completed before 12 January 2013 should still be sent to Resources Safety at the Department of Mines and Petroleum. Completed assessments will still be entered in the MineHealth database.

It is also recommended that any initial or periodic health assessments that have been commenced before 12 January 2013 be completed and the forms sent to Resources Safety for entering into the database.

8. As a worker, will I still be able to access my own health assessment records?

Yes, the MineHealth database will be retained. This will allow individuals to continue making written applications for access to their personal records.

The database will also continue to provide the Commonwealth, State agencies and approved researchers with de-identified data for *bona fide* health-related research.

9. Where can I get more information?

Resources Safety's risk-based health surveillance and biological monitoring guideline will help employers to meet their statutory requirements relating to biological monitoring and the additional health surveillance required when employees are exposed to hazardous substances. The guideline is available in the mines safety publication section of the Department of Mines and Petroleum website (visit www.dmp.wa.gov.au/ResourcesSafety).

For information about occupational health, contact:

Resources Safety

Department of Mines and Petroleum
100 Plain Street EAST PERTH 6004
Telephone: 08 9358 8461
Email: occhealth@dmp.wa.gov.au

Comprehensive work safety and health information provided by the Department of Mines and Petroleum can be found at:

www.dmp.wa.gov.au/ResourcesSafety

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