

Public health advice following the Grenfell Tower fire

Latest update

PHE continues to publish [weekly reports](#) about the air quality in the area surrounding Grenfell Tower.

Previous updates

15 October 2018

PHE's response to reports of toxins in the soil around Grenfell Tower.

PHE Regional Director for London, Dr Yvonne Doyle said:

Since the Grenfell Tower tragedy we have been working very closely with local health partners and the community to ensure they have access to the best available public health evidence and advice. PHE has asked Professor Stec for the data and evidence so that it can be carefully reviewed and appropriate action taken if necessary.

Local authorities are responsible for assessing and legally determining contaminated land within their communities, which are generally considered a very low risk to health because people would need to be exposed to the soil over long periods of time, and we have been providing advice on contamination to Kensington and Chelsea council.

15 September 2017

Public Health England has been assessing air quality in the area surrounding Grenfell Tower since the start of the fire on 14 June. The independent air quality monitoring commissioned by PHE has shown the risk to people's health from air pollution around the Grenfell Tower site to be consistently low. No asbestos has been detected, levels of particulate matter remain low, and monitoring results for dioxins, furans, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are broadly equivalent to background levels for London.

See the [latest air quality data](#) taken from monitoring locations around the site which we publish on a weekly basis and read the [public health advice](#).

14 July

The risk to people's health from air pollution around the Grenfell Tower site continues to be low and no asbestos has been detected.

Following discussions with local residents, PHE has published a report containing the [air quality data](#) from the monitoring locations around the site. The report contains data tables, graphs and photographs of where the equipment is based, alongside an explanation of the data.

13 July 2017

Public Health England has published additional health advice relating to [cyanide](#).

7 July 2017

On Thursday 6 July, regional director for PHE London, Dr Yvonne Doyle and her team attended a community question and answer session near the Grenfell Tower site.

PHE attended to update residents on the continuing air monitoring taking place and to address any concerns about the wider risk to people's physical health.

30 June 2017

Public Health England (PHE) has been providing [specialist advice on health following the Grenfell Tower fire](#). This includes health advice on air quality, smoke exposure, asbestos, and the clean-up process.

Dr Deborah Turbitt, health protection director for PHE in London, said:

We have been assessing air quality over the past week in relation to the Grenfell Tower fire and this shows no detectable deterioration in air quality. Our advice is that the wider risk to people's physical health as a result of the fire, beyond those directly affected, is low.

People who were close to the scene and exposed to smoke from the fire may have experienced irritation to their air passages, skin and eyes, and respiratory symptoms including coughing and wheezing, breathlessness, phlegm production and chest pain. People who have ongoing concerns about their symptoms should call NHS 111 for medical advice.

We know that bound asbestos, contained in building materials such as plaster or fibre board, was present in Grenfell Tower in ceilings and header panels inside airing cupboards. It is possible that very small amounts of asbestos fibres will have been dispersed within the smoke plume but would have formed only a small fraction of the smoke and particles released in the fire; all smoke is toxic and any asbestos would present a minimal additional risk to health.

Asbestos related diseases are typically associated with a long term workplace exposure to high levels of airborne asbestos fibres.

Safety officers working with teams currently on the site have tested the air within Grenfell Tower for dust and asbestos and have not detected any levels of concern. When work commences clearing the site there will be a system of engineering work that will prevent any asbestos being released from the site and a programme of regular environmental air monitoring conducted to ensure that both contractors and local residents are not put at any risk.

Three new air quality monitors have been installed in the immediate area of Grenfell Tower on Saturday (24 June 2017) by an independent environment company. Initial readings show low levels of pollution but PHE will continue to closely monitor all relevant readings to ensure the best advice is given.

Richard Mills, Assistant Commissioner for the London Fire Brigade, said:

Lingering smells of smoke in buildings and homes near Grenfell Tower are to be expected. This will clear over time and can be helped by opening windows and washing or cleaning of items such as curtains and soft furnishings.

Public health advice

Cyanide

Chemicals produced when the Grenfell Tower fire was burning will not be present now. Smoke from any fire is toxic and chemicals that can be present in smoke include carbon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide, hydrogen chloride and hydrogen bromide, as well as others.

The amounts of toxic substances will vary with the specific materials involved in a fire, its temperature and the amount of oxygen. Smoke inhalation may lead to toxins being absorbed into the body, including carbon monoxide and hydrogen cyanide.

Short-term health effects

People who were close to the scene and exposed to smoke from the fire may have experienced irritation to their air passages, skin and eyes, and respiratory symptoms including coughing and wheezing, breathlessness, phlegm production and chest pain. People who continue to experience symptoms should call NHS 111 for medical advice or consult their GP.

Long-term health effects

People who were not directly impacted by the fire or suffered significant smoke inhalation and are generally fit and well are unlikely to experience long-term health problems from temporary indirect exposure to smoke from a fire.

PHE is continuing to commission monitoring for pollutants that have both short and long-term effects, including cancer, to be sure that we understand if there is any risk to public health as a result of the fire and we will keep local people updated with all results.

Asbestos

Asbestos is a term for a group of naturally occurring minerals made of microscopic fibres. Before its dangers to health were known, asbestos was often used in buildings for insulation, flooring and roofing and sprayed on ceilings and walls. It is now banned in the UK. Buildings constructed before the year 2000 may still have asbestos in them.

We know that bound asbestos, contained in building materials such as plaster or fibre board (also known as 'asbestos containing material'), was present in Grenfell Tower in textured ceilings and header panels inside airing cupboards.

Asbestos may be destroyed at very high temperatures such as those that would have happened during the fire.

Safety officers working with teams on the site have tested the air within Grenfell Tower for dust and asbestos and have not detected any levels of concern. Regular environmental air monitoring is being conducted to ensure that both contractors and local residents are not put at any risk.

It is possible that very small amounts of asbestos fibres will have been dispersed within the smoke plume from the fire but would have formed only a small fraction of the smoke and particles released in the fire.

There is little evidence to suggest that asbestos was deposited in the vicinity of Grenfell Tower and any asbestos is likely to have remained within the building structure or inner cordon. Even if small amounts of asbestos containing materials were deposited off site, as the majority of asbestos fibres are held tightly within asbestos containing material, they are not released into the air and this minimises the health risk.

To have any long term health effects of asbestos, a direct exposure by inhaling asbestos fibres would have needed to have taken place over a long period of time. There is evidence to show that breathing in large quantities of asbestos over a long period of time (such as in an occupational setting) mainly affects the lungs and in some cases, it can cause a cancer of the lining of the lung called mesothelioma; it can also cause lung cancer.

Work on the remediation of the Grenfell Tower site will take into account the protection of contractors carrying out the work and of the people in the vicinity. Appropriate mitigation measures such as screens will be installed and monitoring will be undertaken at the site perimeter during the remediation process to ensure there are no off-site impacts from asbestos or harmful materials.

Water quality

Drinking water quality has not been impacted by the fire and tap water is safe to use as normal. Drinking water for the area around Grenfell Tower is supplied by Thames Water and the source of this water supply is not local to Kensington. Water run-off from the Grenfell Tower site would have entered the drainage and sewage system and would be processed as normal, so would not present a risk to physical health.

Air purifiers

Air purifiers, which are generally used to reduce allergens from pets from the air, are not recommended for use in this situation because larger particles produced during the fire will have already settled and not be present in the air.

Larger dust particles settle quickly onto surfaces and are best removed by dusting with a damp cloth.

Locally grown fruit and vegetables

People with gardens in the local area should continue to use their fruit and vegetables as normal ensuring that they are washed and peeled before cooking or eating.