

Protecting Minnesotans from Environmental Harm

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) actively works to protect Minnesotans' health and prevent diseases like cancer. MDH works with families, neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces to create conditions that support the health of all Minnesotans, no matter where they live.



The Environmental Health Division (EHD) of MDH focuses on many conditions in the environment that affect health. The “environment” includes the areas where we live, learn, work, worship, and play. It’s made up of the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, and other conditions we may not control, but which can affect our health. We also work behind the scenes, for example by performing inspections and enforcing rules and regulations, collecting and monitoring data, providing technical assistance, developing educational materials, and communicating with individuals and community groups.

You might be surprised at the many ways in which MDH EHD and local public health and environmental agency partners work to protect Minnesotans from environmental hazards.



Air

We strive for cleaner air inside our homes, restaurants, schools, and workplaces. We enforce smoking regulations in public places and work places. We educate people about the potential health effects of asbestos, mold, carbon monoxide, radon, and other indoor air contaminants. We inspect and oversee licensed asbestos removal projects to protect workers and building occupants.



Water

We work with communities to protect the source(s) of their drinking water. We inspect and monitor public drinking water for more than 100 contaminants. We make sure public and private wells are properly constructed and sealed. We investigate and communicate the health risk and exposure potential of contaminants in drinking water. We educate and assist professionals, communities, private well users, and households across the state about water quality and stewardship.



Food

We establish and enforce health standards to ensure clean and healthy conditions at restaurants, lodging establishments, events and entertainment venues, and school kitchens. We educate the public about food safety. We also provide statewide and site-specific guidelines for safely eating fish from Minnesota lakes and rivers.



Recreation

We establish and enforce health standards to ensure clean and healthy conditions at pools, resorts, children’s camps, recreation camping areas, and sports arenas.



Homes and lodging

We establish and enforce health standards to ensure clean and healthy conditions in homes, hotels, motels, resorts, manufactured home parks, and recreational camping areas. We educate people about many common hazards found in homes, and other indoor environments such as asbestos, mold, carbon monoxide, lead (such as in lead-based paint), radon, and other contaminants in indoor air, water and household dust. When a child has been exposed to lead and the State is notified, or when inspectors visit their homes to identify lead hazards, we help families and landlords take steps to reduce the health risk from household lead.

We establish and enforce health standards to ensure clean and healthy conditions at schools and businesses.



Communities

We establish and enforce health standards to ensure clean and healthy conditions at schools and businesses. Our inspectors visit schools and other buildings to ensure workers and occupants are protected during licensed asbestos removal or to identify lead hazards when lead poisoning cases are reported.



Weather and climate

We work with public health and allied professionals to proactively protect the health of Minnesotans from climate change impacts. We provide education, research, and technical assistance to create health and climate solutions across our State.



Chemicals and hazards

We evaluate potential health risks from harmful chemical and physical agents in the environment. We work with federal and state agencies to assess and prevent possible human health risks from contamination caused by historical waste disposal practices, accidental chemical spills, and potential hazards from agricultural and industrial activities. In order to lower health risks, we develop health education programs and materials to assist individuals and communities in recognizing environmental hazards and preventing exposures.



Radiation

We establish and enforce health standards to prevent unnecessary exposure to harmful radiation or radioactive materials. We inspect X-ray generating devices in businesses and health care settings to ensure proper functioning to prevent radiation over exposures to staff and the public. We monitor for radiation around the two nuclear power plants and will provide technical advice in the event of a nuclear power plant emergency.



Licenses and certifications

We ensure many contractors, consultants, inspectors, operators, and laboratories have the right training, skills and work practices to protect Minnesotans from a variety of environmental hazards.



How can I report concerns about cancer in my community?

To share concerns about cancer in your community, please contact the **Minnesota Cancer Reporting System** at 651-201-5900 or email health.mcrs@state.mn.us.

To report concerns about cancer in your community due to exposure to an environmental contaminant, please contact the **Minnesota Department of Health Environmental Health Division** at 651-201-4897 or email health.hazard@state.mn.us.

Did You Know?

The most significant risks of developing cancer come from lifestyle factors. However, exposure to some human-made chemicals and naturally-occurring substances in the environment can cause cancer. Not all exposure to these chemical substances lead to cancer.



What can I do if I have concerns about cancer?

Talk to a health care provider. If you have health concerns about cancer it is important to discuss your questions with a health care professional, such as a physician, nurse practitioner, traditional healer, community health worker, or community health representative.

Screening can identify certain cancers early when they are more easily treatable and reduce the risk of death from those cancers. Effective screening programs exist for breast, cervical, colorectal, and lung cancers.

Learn more. Visit our website at www.health.state.mn.us for information about cancer, or www.health.state.mn.us/cancerandenvironment for information about cancer and the environment.

Review lifestyle factors. Preventing cancer through healthy daily living is important. For more information, see the “Lowering Your Risk for Cancer” information sheet www.health.state.mn.us/cancerandenvironment.

Resources

A list of substances known to elevate the risk of cancer can be found on our website, www.health.state.mn.us/cancerandenvironment.

The American Cancer Society (ACS) (www.cancer.org/about-us/local/minnesota.html) also provides information and resources for Minnesotans with cancer.

To learn more about cancer, cancer resources, and prevention, visit us at our website, www.health.state.mn.us/cancerandenvironment.



The Minnesota Department of Health is here for you.

Our vision is for health equity in Minnesota, where all communities are thriving and all people have what they need to be healthy.