

Asbestosis

Asbestosis mortality in Great Britain 1978-2009

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Summary

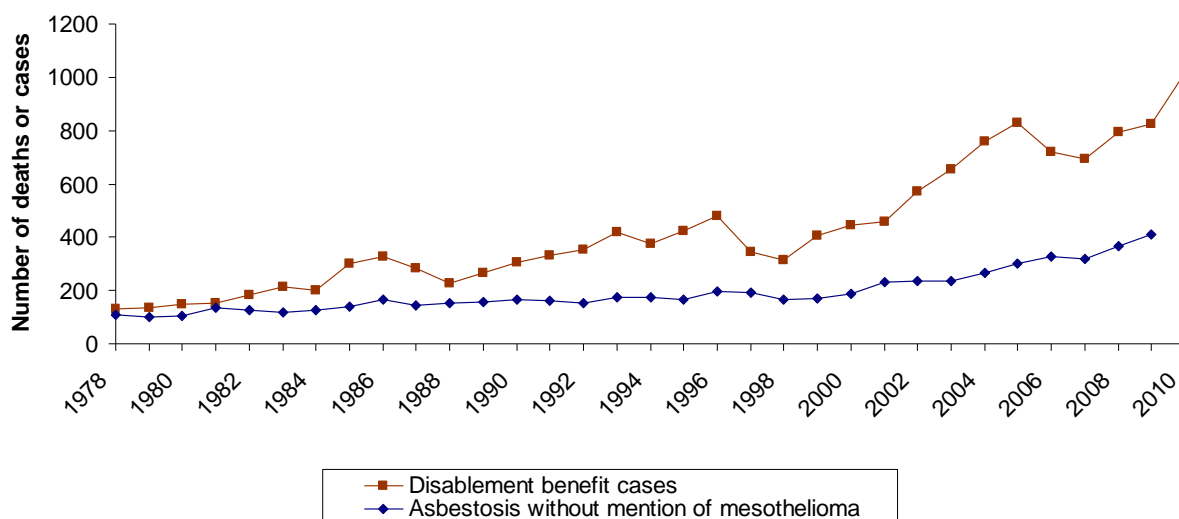
The information in this document relates to Health and Safety statistics for 2010/11. The document can be found at: www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/asbestosis/index.htm

Deaths from asbestosis continue to increase in Great Britain, a legacy of heavy exposures to asbestos in the past.

The latest information shows:

- In 2009 there were 411 deaths where asbestosis is likely to have contributed as a cause compared with 109 in 1978. (Asbestosis register).
- There were 189 deaths in 2009 where asbestosis was specifically recorded as the underlying cause of death. (Asbestosis register).
- Numbers of newly assessed cases for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit have increased more rapidly than asbestosis deaths in recent years.
- The number of newly assessed cases for 2010 was 1 015. (IIDB).

Figure 1 – Annual deaths based on death certificates mentioning asbestosis without mention of mesothelioma and disablement benefit cases 1978-2010



Introduction

Asbestosis is a form of pneumoconiosis defined as lung fibrosis caused by the inhalation of asbestos fibres. The disease is characterised by scarring and inflammation of the lung tissue. It is an irreversible condition with no cure. Symptoms include shortness of breath, persistent cough, fatigue, laboured and rapid breathing and chest pain. These can seriously affect normal daily activity and lead to various complications which can be fatal.

It is generally recognised that heavy asbestos exposures are required in order to produce clinically significant asbestosis within the lifetime of an individual. Current trends therefore still largely reflect the results of heavy exposures in the past.

Overall scale of disease including trends

The Health and Safety Executive maintains a register of all deaths where death certificates mention asbestosis. These deaths include those where the underlying cause is specifically identified as asbestosis, but also those with other underlying causes but where asbestosis was nevertheless mentioned in the textual description of the cause of death. (The underlying cause of death is defined as the disease or injury that initiated the train of morbid events leading directly to death.) Thus the total number of deaths on the asbestosis register gives an indication of the number of individuals who were suffering from asbestosis when they died. In 2009 there were 451 deaths where the death certificate mentioned asbestosis and of these 189 had asbestosis recorded as the underlying cause of death see Table ASIS01 at www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/asis01.xls.

Interpretation of these figures is complicated by two issues:

Cases of asbestosis may sometimes not be recorded as such because they may be mistaken for other types of lung fibrosis or may go undiagnosed.

The word "asbestosis" is often mentioned on death certificates along with other asbestos-related diseases - i.e. mesothelioma and/or lung cancer. On some death certificates the wording of the cause of death description suggests that the word asbestosis is sometimes used incorrectly as a general term for any asbestos-related disease – for example, to indicate the role of asbestos in causing mesothelioma and/or lung cancer - rather than the presence of asbestos-induced lung fibrosis per se. This is particularly the case for mesothelioma, where the phrase "industrial disease of asbestosis" is sometimes used when mesothelioma is given as a cause of death.

Figure 2 (below) illustrates four different categories of asbestosis deaths in 4 bands across the chart. The bottom band shows deaths where the underlying cause of death was specified as asbestosis. The second band shows deaths where asbestosis was not given as the underlying cause but was mentioned in the absence of other asbestos related diseases. Bands 3 and 4 show deaths certificates where asbestos was mentioned with lung cancer and mesothelioma respectively. (NB: a few death certificates mentioning all three diseases are included within band 4).

The best indication of the number of deaths where asbestosis contributed as a cause is to exclude death certificates mentioning mesothelioma. There were 411 such deaths in 2009 compared with 109 in 1978.

Figure 2 - Asbestosis deaths and disablement benefit cases 1978-2010

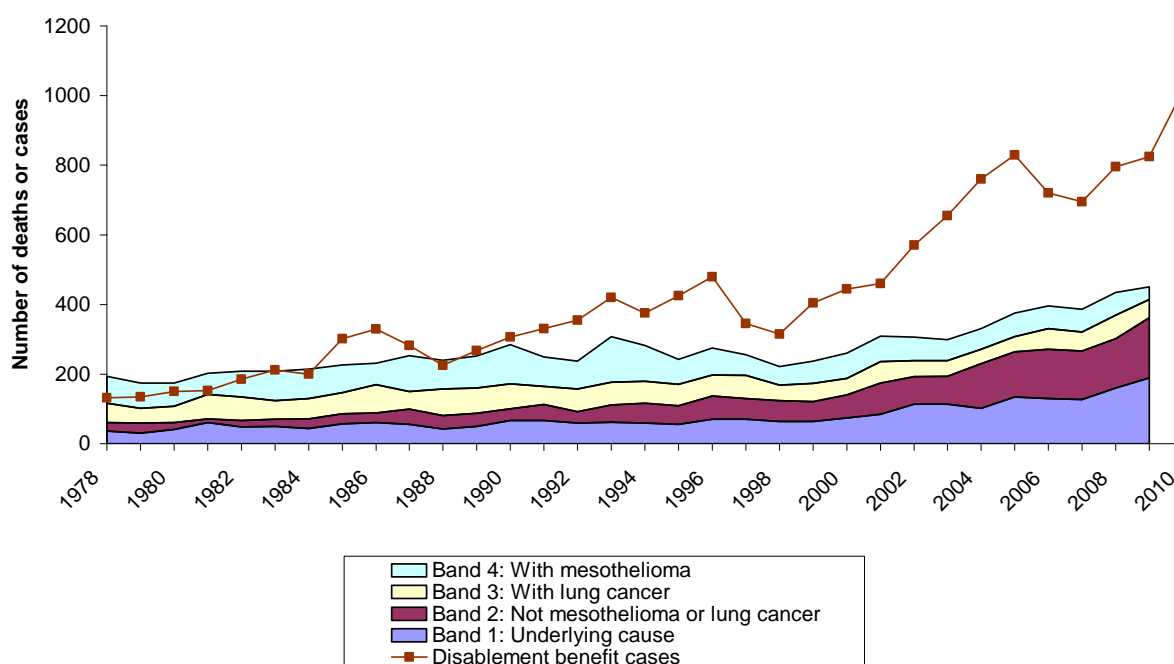
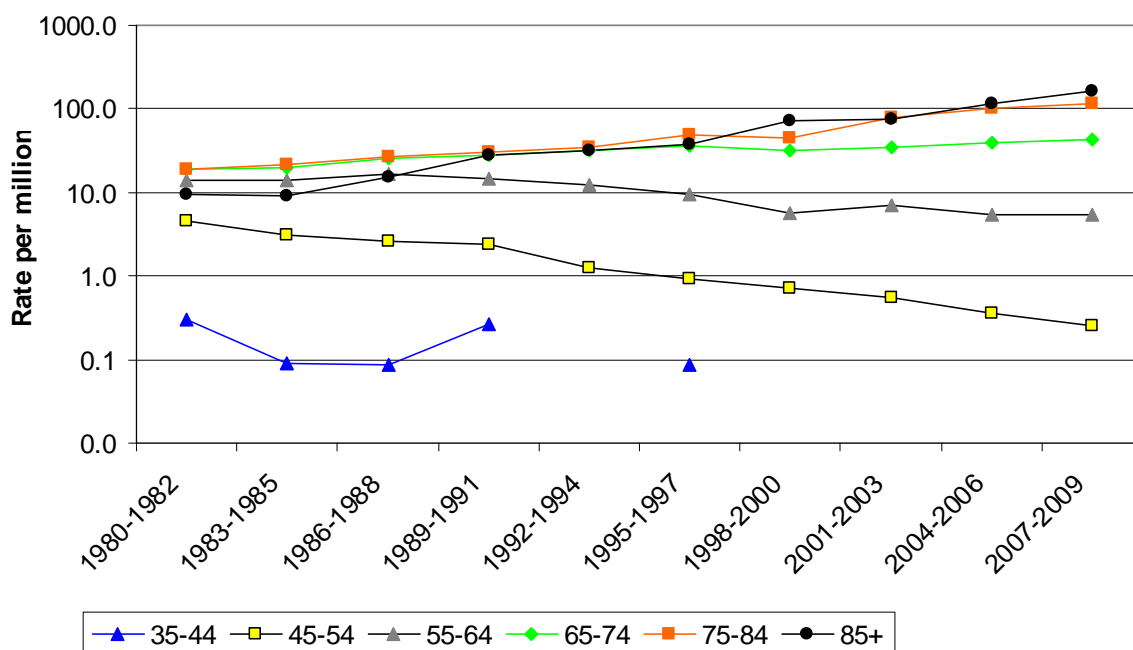


Table IIDB06 www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/iidb06.xls shows the number of new cases of asbestosis (and other forms of pneumoconiosis) assessed under the Industrial Injuries and Disablement Benefit (IIDB) scheme. The number of cases of asbestosis has increased from 132 in 1978 to 1 015 in 2010 (see Figures 1 & 2).

Table ASIS02 www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/asis02.xls shows the total number of death certificates mentioning the term asbestosis without mention of mesothelioma among males, and equivalent death rates, by age group for the ten three-year time periods during 1980-2009. Death rates for males are also shown in Figure 3. There are large differences in the magnitude of the rates between the different age groups. Death rates at ages below 55 have been falling since the early 1990s with strongly increasing rates confined to deaths at ages 75 and above.

Figure 3 – Average annual male death rates based on death certificates mentioning asbestosis but not mentioning mesothelioma by age and time period, 1980-2009 (p)



(p) provisional.

Due to the small number of female deaths, age-specific death rates for women have not been shown.

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