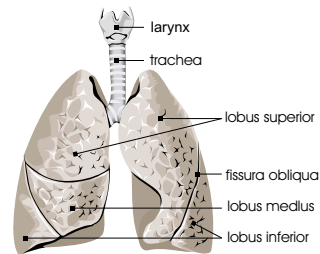


Introduction

This pamphlet provides plant workers, crab harvesters and the community at large, a brief explanation of the issues related to crab asthma and the measures being introduced to address these issues. For those wishing a more in-depth study of the subject, additional information can be obtained through research and literature articles.

What Is Crab Asthma?

Crab asthma is a term used to describe a specific type of occupational asthma that results from over exposure to airborne dusts, mists, fumes or aerosols that are generated when cooking, steaming, cutting or crushing crab in processing plants.



Asthma is a respiratory disease that results in breathing difficulties. Other substances that have been linked to occupational asthma include certain types of wood, paints, flour, glues and animals.

How Are Stakeholders Working Together?

A working group has been assigned the responsibility of addressing the issues surrounding crab asthma. The group is made up of representatives from:

- Occupational Health and Safety (Department of Labour),
- Fish, Food and Allied Workers,
- Fisheries Association of Newfoundland and Labrador,
- Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture,
- Department of Health and Community Services, and
- Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission

The primary mandate of the working group is to consult with industry and its workers to ensure all measures that can be taken will be taken to minimize the adverse effects of shellfish (crab) asthma on plant workers in this province while still permitting our plants to operate and provide valuable employment in areas throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

How Does Crab Asthma Affect Workers?

The majority of crab workers do not experience any of the health effects associated with crab asthma. However, some workers will develop asthma-like symptoms when working with crab. These symptoms may occur after a few weeks to several years of working in crab plants. While symptoms usually improve over holidays, weekends and after the end of the season, they may persist, thus leading to a permanent disease or disability.

Research has indicated that the longer you work while having symptoms associated with occupa-

tional asthma, the less likely you are to completely recover.

These symptoms usually include coughing, wheezing, chest tightness and shortness of breath. The symptoms often start while at work, improve at home but sometimes awaken the person at night. Workers may also experience itchy or watery eyes, stuffy, runny nose and / or skin rashes.

How Can We Diagnose Crab Asthma?

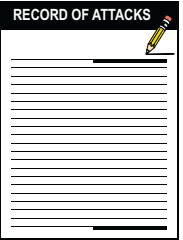
Specific procedures are used to determine whether or not workers have crab asthma. They include physical examinations, filling out questionnaires, monitoring of breathing both during and after work, and specific inhalation challenges. For the tests to be effective, it is important that employees remain at work while this type of objective testing is being completed. The tests are usually completed within a two to four week period depending on available resources. People who have severe asthmatic attacks may be withdrawn from the workplace prior to tests being completed. In these cases, the family doctor will determine the plan of action for diagnosis.

Your physician may also ask you to keep records of suspected asthmatic attacks. The records may include the time of day that symptoms occur, the effects on the body, any noticeable periods of improvement or deterioration, and the overall pattern of the symptoms. All of the necessary tests may not be completed initially,



however every effort will be made to identify people who have developed crab asthma.

Employees who are diagnosed with crab asthma based on tests prescribed will be considered for compensation.



What Procedures Should Be Followed If You Suspect That You Have Crab Asthma?

Like any other workplace illness, crab asthma may be compensable through the Workplace, Health, Safety and Compensation Commission. If you are exposed to crab and believe that you have symptoms suggestive of asthma it is important to **consult your physician as early as possible** so that a proper investigation can be completed.

However, suspicion of symptoms is not enough to diagnose occupational asthma. An objective diagnosis must be completed by qualified personnel and certain criteria must be met to ensure eligibility for consideration of compensation.

If you are applying for a claim the following steps will help you in ensuring that it is processed as quickly as possible.

Step 1: Report to your employer that you believe you have symptoms that are suggestive of crab asthma.

Step 2: Complete a Worker's Report of Injury (Form 6). These should be available from your employer or union office. Forms are also available from any Commission office. It is important that this form be completed with as much detail as possible.

Step 3: Consult with your physician who will obtain your medical history and monitor your breathing using a small device called a peak flow meter. Your breathing will have to be monitored while you are at work and at home at least four times a day over a period of time. This protocol is necessary to arrive at a diagnosis.



Step 4: Your doctor may refer you to a specialist if further testing is necessary.

Step 5: Your claim will be accepted once diagnosis is confirmed.

How Can Crab Workers Prevent Crab Asthma?

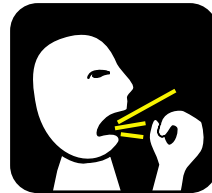
- ☞ Become aware of the symptoms (stuffy runny nose, itchy skin, breathing difficulties) associated with crab asthma.
- ☞ Observe whether or not co-workers display any crab asthma symptoms. If they do, suggest that they see a physician.
- ☞ Consult with a family physician as soon as possible if you suspect that you may have crab asthma.
- ☞ Remain at work (if asthmatic attacks are not too severe) until an objective evaluation has

been made. This should only be done in consultation with your physician.

- ☞ Complete the tests as directed by your physician.

How Can Employers Prevent Crab Asthma?

- ☞ Ensure that cookers are installed to prevent the release of steam, mists and vapors into the workplace environment.
- ☞ Cool the cooked crab as quickly as possible. This should result in a decreased concentration of steam, mist or vapors, thus reducing exposure to employees.
- ☞ Ensure measures are taken to reduce the possibility of airborne contaminants from reaching other areas of the plant.
- ☞ Evaluate existing ventilation systems to ensure adequate air exchange.
- ☞ Relocate where possible employees who may be experiencing crab asthma symptoms to other job tasks to minimize exposure.
- ☞ Adhere to a regularly scheduled preventative maintenance program. All components of the ventilation systems, cookers, crushers, and other related items should be properly maintained.
- ☞ Consider design factors when restructuring existing plans or building new plants. Consult with the Department of Labour as per Section 5 of the OH&S Regulations.



For further information, please call:

**Prevention Services Department
Workplace Health, Safety and
Compensation Commission
146-148 Forest Road,
P.O. Box 9000
St. John's, NF A1A 3B8
Tel: 778-1552 or 1-800-563-9000
Fax: 778-1564**

or

**Department of Labour
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NF A1B 4J6
Tel.: 729-1932 or 1-800-563-5471
Fax: 729-6639**



*Prevention Services Staff
working with
you towards 'Best Practices'*

CRAB ASTHMA



*Printed for Crab Workers/Harvesters
and Processors of
Newfoundland and Labrador*

*Let us help you in the
fight against crab asthma.*

**WORKPLACE HEALTH, SAFETY
AND COMPENSATION COMMISSION**

