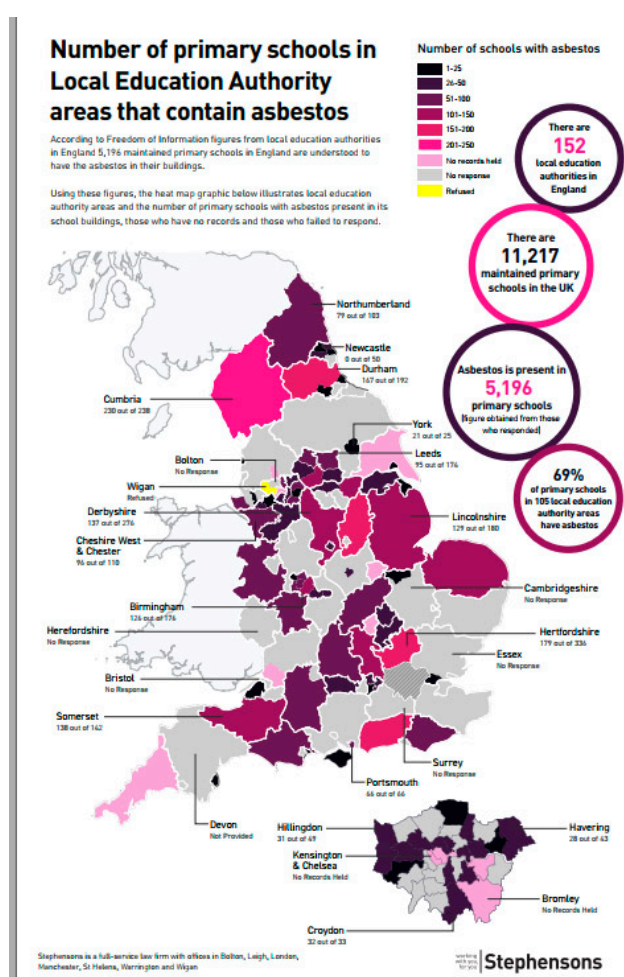


A deadly disease in our schools you've probably never heard of

Today -July 4th – is National Mesothelioma Day and this year the charity Mesothelioma UK is drawing attention to the risk to children in primary schools.

Politicians and environmentalists are rightly concerned about the quality of air in our cities and the traffic pollution around schools where parents leave their engines idling while waiting to collect pupils at the end of the school day. But there is a menace that lurks behind the plaster, in the damaged roofs, rotten windows and broken ceiling tiles of primary schools built or repaired roughly between the years of 1940 to 1980.

Mesthelioma is a cancer caused by breathing in asbestos dust and while asbestos is banned in the UK, it is still to be found in many homes, schools and offices.



Last year the Department of Education asked all schools to report how much asbestos was in their buildings. Nearly a quarter (23%) of schools failed to respond by the February 2019 deadline. A Freedom of Information (FOI) request by Stephenson's Solicitors LLP received replies from just 69% of the 152 local education authorities in England but the results give cause for concern:

- 5,196 maintained primary schools are likely to contain asbestos
- A further 3,791 schools could contain asbestos
- At least 319 teachers have died from mesothelioma since 1980
- 205 of these deaths have occurred since 2001 (source: National Education Union)
- Academies and free schools are not required to report to their local education authority on asbestos because they are outside their control

Kate Sweeney, partner in personal injury at Stephenson's, pointed out that asbestos is found in many primary schools because the buildings are very old: 'Parents and teachers have a right to know if asbestos is present and what measures are being taken to manage exposure.'

There is no safe level of asbestos and the effects will not show up for several decades so Stephenson's and Mesothelioma UK are calling for all schools and local education authorities to publicly disclose if asbestos is on the premises and the measures being taken to manage it.

Liz Darlison, Head of Services at Mesothelioma UK, said: 'Sadly, the UK has the highest incidence of mesothelioma in the world.'

See the NEU fact file:
<https://www.teachers.org.uk/edufacts/asbestos>