

## What is mesothelioma?

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Mesothelioma is a cancer of the mesothelium. The mesothelium is a thin membrane that lines the chest and abdomen and surrounds the organs in these areas. The lining around the lungs is called the pleura and in the abdomen it is known as the peritoneum.

About 2000 people in the UK are diagnosed with mesothelioma each year.

Mesothelioma of the lining of the lungs, known as pleural mesothelioma, is much more common than mesothelioma in the peritoneum. For every one person with peritoneal mesothelioma, there will be about 12 people who have pleural mesothelioma.

### Pleural mesothelioma

The pleura has two layers: the inner (visceral) layer, which is next to the lung; and the outer (parietal) layer, which lines the chest wall. The two layers of the pleura are usually in contact and slide over each other as we breathe. The membranes produce fluid, which allows them to slide over each other easily.

When mesothelioma develops in the pleura (pleural mesothelioma), the delicate membranes thicken and may press inwards on the lung. Fluid may also collect between the two layers of the pleura: this is known as a pleural effusion.

### Structure of the lungs and pleura

#### Peritoneal mesothelioma

The lining of the abdomen is known as the peritoneum. It also has two layers: the inner (visceral) layer, which is next to the abdominal organs, and the outer (parietal) layer, which lines the abdominal wall.

If the mesothelioma is in the peritoneum it is called peritoneal mesothelioma and causes thickening of the membranes surrounding the abdominal organs and a collection of fluid in the abdomen. The collection of fluid is called ascites and causes swelling of the abdomen.

Side view of the abdomen. The peritoneum is shown as the thick line surrounding the abdominal organs.