

# Coal Board Confusion: A Simple Guide to the Queensland Coal Mine Workers' Health Scheme

There have been some recent changes made to the regulations in Queensland governing coal mine safety and health. These changes were introduced to ensure improved detection of coal workers' pneumoconiosis.

Since these changes, the Department of Natural Resources and Mines continues to refine its standards for these health assessments, including placing a greater focus on spirometry testing and chest x-ray imaging.

For those new to the coal mining industry, or just wanting to get their facts straight in relation to the scheme in light of the recent changes, we've put together a cheat sheet to give you all the information you need to know.

## What is the Coal Mine Workers' Health Scheme?

The Coal Mine Workers' Health Scheme (sometimes referred to as the Queensland Coal Board Medical) was developed to ensure the health of Queensland coal mine workers. The scheme includes mandatory medical testing of coal miners prior to employment and ongoing monitoring throughout their employment, by ensuring they undergo compulsory pre-employment and periodic health assessments.

## Mandatory Requirements

All coal mine workers must undergo a health assessment prior to employment. This assessment must include the following tests:

- Respiratory function (i.e. Spirometry test)
- Audiometry
- Vision
- Urinalysis
- Auditory canal examination
- Cardiovascular system examination
- Musculoskeletal system examination
- Abdomen examination
- Skin examination
- Medical history questionnaire
- Chest X-Ray examination to ILO standard

*Note: A drug and alcohol test is not a mandatory requirement of the Queensland Coal Board Medical, however many mine sites will require the employee have one prior to them being able to access the mine site. If the employee requires an instant drug and alcohol test, you will need to request this in addition to the Coal Board Medical at the time of requesting an appointment from your occupational health provider.*

## Obtaining The Results

Once the Coal Board Medical assessment has been completed, a Nominated Medical Advisor (NMA) will review the results and complete a summary report called a 'section 4'.

Not all medical practitioners can provide this report as they must have completed additional training and be appointed as an NMA under the scheme.

The section 4 report of the Coal Board Medical is the only information from the medical that the employer is privy to. The actual results of the medical (e.g. audiometry results) are not able to be supplied to the employer, due to confidentiality.

If this information is required, you'll need to request a company pre-employment medical at the same time as requesting a Queensland Coal Board Medical. The results from the company pre-employment medical are able to be released to the employer once the employee has signed a consent form agreeing to such release of confidential medical information.

The medical results and information contained within the Coal Board Medical are submitted to the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy (DNRME). The confidentiality of the information contained within the Coal Board Medical is protected by law, and the results of a Coal Board Medical can only be released to the worker or a representative, appointed in writing, by the worker.

## When Does a Queensland Coal Board Medical Expire?

A Queensland Coal Board Medical is only valid for five years from the date recorded on the section 4 report, unless a further review date has been specified by the Nominated Medical Adviser. If a further review date has been recorded this is the date at which time a review will need to be completed to continue working onsite within the coal mining industry

As part of the Coal Mine Workers' Health Scheme, employers must ensure that coal board medicals are completed for every new employee, and each worker must be retested at least once every five years.

If a coal mine worker changes employers, a new Coal Board Medical exam may be required.

## Why am I required to undergo a Chest X-ray?

Pneumoconiosis is a series of diseases caused by the inhalation of organic or inorganic dusts or chemical irritants. Typically, the disease occurs from exposure to these irritants over a prolonged period of time.

The type and severity of the disease depends on the composition of the dust; small quantities of some substances, notably silica and asbestos, produce severe reactions, while milder irritants produce symptoms of lung disease only with significant excessive exposure.

Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis (CWP) is a chronic occupational lung disease caused by long-term inhalation of coal dust and is commonly referred to as 'black lung'.

CWP causes inflammation of the alveoli, which are tiny sacs in the lungs that allow oxygen and carbon dioxide to move between the lungs and bloodstream. Inflammation of the alveoli will eventually result in irreversible damage to the lungs.

CWP ranges in severity from simple to advanced; the most severe form is progressive massive fibrosis (PMF). Advanced CWP is debilitating and often fatal.

Detection and monitoring for CWP requires specialist radiology assessments in the form of chest x-rays.

## Specialist Radiology Assessments for Chest X-Rays

Specialist radiologists in Queensland are qualified to competently read chest X-rays to the required international standards for determining pneumoconiosis (International Labour Organisation Standard International Classification of Radiographs of Pneumoconioses).

However, the [Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists](#) (RANZCR) recommends that, for screening purposes, mining companies and their employees ensure that chest X-rays are reported by a clinical radiologist who is experienced in detecting coal workers' pneumoconiosis. RANZCR has compiled a [list of radiologists](#) who are available, competent and committed to using the ILO classification.

KINNECT ensures all chest x-rays performed for coal mine workers are reviewed and reported on by a clinical radiologist who is experienced in detecting coal workers' pneumoconiosis and as such meet ILO standards.

Further to this, it is now a mandatory requirement for all chest x-rays to be reviewed a second time by a specialist radiologist in the United States.

This secondary review process is known as the B-reader process. Once the employee has undertaken their health assessment and chest x-ray, the NMA will review the results and issue an interim section 4 report.

A final section 4 report cannot be issued until such time as the B-reader process has been completed and a final report on the chest x-ray has been provided back from the specialist radiologist in the United States. This process can take several months, which is why an interim section 4 is issued, allowing the employee to commence employment in the coal mining industry and access the relevant coal mine site.

## Periodic Monitoring with KINNECT

An employee must undergo a new Coal Board Medical and Chest X Ray every five years.

KINNECT keeps track of this for you in our custom-built online health surveillance portal – Carelever. When the employee approaches their medical expiration date, you will be automatically notified and a new coal board medical health assessment can quickly and easily be scheduled through KINNECT's extensive network of clinics.

This means, you'll never miss these mandatory medicals, ensuring your workers stay safe and your legislative obligations are consistently met, without complicated tracking processes needing to be in place on your end.

The requirements of this process can be confusing, but KINNECT can help you navigate through the minefield that is Coal Board Medicals by taking the administrative and organisational component of this process off your hands.

Our turnkey solution for employers of coal miners ensures you're meeting your legislative obligations and that the entire process is as efficient as possible.

Contact us to learn more and get started.