

Citizen's Guide Childhood Cancer Incidence Health Consultation August 1997

New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services
Division of Environmental and Occupational Health Services

In the Spring of 1995 the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) asked the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (NJDHSS) for cancer incidence information for children living in Dover Township, New Jersey. ATSDR's request was made in response to a call from a nurse treating cancer patients at an out-of-state children's hospital concerned about the number of patients from Dover Township. The NJDHSS examined reports of childhood cancer from the State Cancer Registry between 1979 and 1991 and found a higher amount of childhood cancer for the Township than expected.

In response to community concerns, the ATSDR and NJDHSS developed a Public Health Response Plan. One part of that plan is the *Childhood Cancer Incidence Health Consultation*. The purposes of this consultation are:

- to validate and update childhood cancer statistics for Dover Township through 1995, and,
- to find out which cancers were elevated in order to develop appropriate follow-up strategies.

This Citizen's Guide summarizes the findings of the *Childhood Cancer Incidence Health Consultation*.

What are the findings of the Childhood Cancer Incidence Health Consultation?

The *Childhood Cancer Incidence Health Consultation* examined the number of cancers arising in children under 20 years of age from 1979 through 1995 for Dover Township, the Toms River section of the Township, and Ocean County.

Increased childhood cancer incidence over those seventeen years was found...

...in Dover Township: for all cancers combined, and for acute lymphocytic leukemia in females.

...in Toms River: for all cancers combined, and for brain and central nervous system cancers and acute lymphocytic leukemia, particularly in female children under the age of five.

In Ocean County, overall cancer incidence was not elevated, but sympathetic nervous system cancers (specifically neuroblastoma), and one type of brain cancer (astrocytoma) were.

Evaluation of childhood cancer incidence over time showed periods when the cancer rates were higher than the New Jersey State rates. Dover Township had higher rates for all cancers combined, leukemia, and brain and central nervous system cancers during the mid- to late-1980s. Toms River had a distinct peak for all cancers combined in the late 1980s. However, the number of cases in any given year was too small to make any definitive statements on trends.

What do these findings mean?

The findings of the *Childhood Cancer Incidence Health Consultation* demonstrate that childhood cancer incidence was significantly higher than expected in Dover Township. However, since this consultation only presents a description of the amount of cancer diagnosed in each area, no statements on *why* childhood cancer rates are higher can be made. These results should serve to help focus future activities on the nature and extent of childhood cancer in Ocean County.

What are the follow-up plans for childhood cancer in Dover?

The NJDHSS, in consultation with the ATSDR, is planning to conduct an epidemiological case-control study of childhood cancer in Dover Township in order to identify possible disease risk factors.

Who was involved in this Health Consultation?

The *Childhood Cancer Incidence Health Consultation* was prepared by the NJDHSS in collaboration with the ATSDR. Additionally, the Consultation was conducted in cooperation with the Citizens Action Committee on Childhood Cancer Cluster, the Ocean County Health Department, and an independent scientific/medical Expert Panel.

What other actions are occurring as part of the Public Health Response Plan?

The Public Health Response Plan is a series of actions intended to systematically compile and validate information on childhood cancer in Dover Township, and to generate hypotheses about possible causes. Specific environmental issues will be examined to learn about potential past and present environmental exposures in the community. The plan consists of these seven elements:

- Ciba-Geigy Health Consultation
- Reich Farm Health Consultation
- Dover Township Public Drinking Water Health Consultation
- Childhood Cancer Incidence Analysis Health Consultation
- Inclusion of New Jersey in a Multi-State Study of Brain Cancer and Superfund Sites
- Community and Health Professional Health Education
- Compendium of Environmental Contamination Sources in Dover Township

Who can I call if I have questions?

Please call the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services at (732) 505-4188 if you have questions regarding this report or other Public Health Response Plan activities, or if you would like a copy of the complete report. Specific questions concerning your personal health can be best answered by your physician or health care provider.

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