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DOH NEWS

State of New York
Department of Health

Hudson River PCB Research Project Announced

ALBANY, April 23, 1999 - The State Health Department today announced a new research project, PCBs and Health: The Hudson River Communities Project, that will examine the possible effects of exposure to PCBs on the human nervous system. For the project, the Health Department is recruiting 100 residents, both men and women, between the ages of 55 and 74 who have lived in the villages of Fort Edward or Hudson Falls for at least 25 years. These villages are two areas where PCBs have been used in manufacturing operations. In addition, a control group is being recruited consisting of men and women, also between the ages of 55 and 74, who have resided in the city of Glens Falls for at least 25 years. Glens Falls was selected because it is upriver from where PCBs were used in manufacturing operations.

The focus of the project is current and past exposure through the consumption of PCB-contaminated fish or through airborne PCBs. Therefore, to be eligible for the project, participants must not have worked in a job where they may have been potentially exposed to PCBs. Information collected from the Fort Edward/Hudson Falls group will be compared to information collected from the Glens Falls control group. Department of Health researchers will analyze project data to see if the two groups score differently on the nervous system tests, and whether or not the differences are associated with higher PCB exposures and blood PCB levels.

PCBs are a group of 209 man-made chemicals that were used in many commercial and electrical products until their manufacture was banned in the mid-1970s. The manufacturing of PCBs was halted in the United States because of evidence relating to environmental buildup and its potential harmful effects. Edible portions of sport fish from the Hudson River are also known to contain PCBs.

This project is designed to address whether exposure to PCBs may cause biological changes in the nervous system such as memory loss, decreased muscle coordination and control, and decreased sense of smell.

This two-phase project will include interviews, biological sampling, and nervous system tests in Phase I, and environmental sampling in Phase II. The interviews will include questions about participants' consumption and preparation of fish caught locally, residential histories, and lifestyle characteristics such as cigarette smoking. Biological sampling will include collecting a blood sample from each participant and analyzing the samples to determine blood PCB level. The nervous system tests will measure small changes in short term memory, muscular movement abilities, and sense of smell. They will involve identifying odors, shapes or words and performing simple tasks with hands and fingers.

The environmental sampling in Phase II will involve air testing for PCBs in and near participants' homes. Participants will be paid up to \$100, including \$50 for the interview, blood sampling, and nervous system tests, and another \$50 for the completion of the air sampling. This project is funded by the Agency for Toxic Substance Disease Registry (ATSDR) for three years and will begin this summer.