



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT of HEALTH

OFFICE OF STATE HEALTH OFFICER
600 East Boulevard Avenue, Dept. 301
Bismarck, N.D. 58505-0200
www.ndhealth.gov



February 25, 2009

Dear Provider:

The North Dakota Department of Health, in cooperation with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry and the University of Cincinnati, will be conducting a study to investigate the impact of erionite in western North Dakota on human health. This letter will provide you with some background information about the study should any of your patients ask you about it.

Erionite is an asbestos-like mineral found in many outcroppings in western North Dakota that has been used as a source of commercial gravel for over 20 years, including application to public roads. The greatest use of the mineral has been in Dunn, Stark and Slope counties. Erionite is considered to be a human carcinogen and has been associated with mesothelioma in other countries, but all forms of the mineral do not necessarily pose a risk to human health. In western North Dakota, people may be exposed to erionite by any activity that stirs up the dust of the gravel that contains it (e.g., working in a gravel quarry, driving on the roads).

The planned study, which is anticipated to begin in the spring of 2009, will determine the prevalence of radiographic changes of people who are believed to have had prolonged heavy exposure to erionite dust. In addition to a detailed history, study participants will have chest radiographs and chest CT studies completed. The finding of a higher than expected prevalence of pleural changes (plaques, pleural thickening) in study participants would be an indication that the erionite poses a risk.

Individual results will be shared with study participants who will be encouraged to share the results with their personal physicians, especially for any conditions requiring follow-up. It is possible that patients may ask you about erionite and about their personal risk. At this time, the risk is not known. It is hoped that the study will help answer that question. Results of the study are expected before the end of 2009 and aggregate results will be shared with the public.

For Additional Information:

You will find additional clinical information about asbestos (which erionite resembles) accompanying this letter. Providers who have questions about dust-inhalation lung diseases and the health effects of erionite exposure may contact Dr. Joel Blanchard, occupational medicine physician at MedCenter One, at (701) 323-5222 (email: jblanchard@mohs.org). Providers with questions about the management of specific patients with a dust-inhalation lung disease may contact Dr. Nick Neumann, pulmonologist with UND School of Medicine, at (701) 751-9579 (email: neumann@medicine.nodak.edu). Providers with questions about the erionite study in western North Dakota may contact Dr. Stephen Pickard, medical epidemiologist with the North Dakota Department of Health, at (701) 328-2365 (email: spickard@nd.gov). Additional information about erionite can also be found on the North Dakota Department of Health website at <http://www.ndhealth.gov/> under Current Issues.

Sincerely,

Terry L. Dwelle, MD, MPHTM, CPH
State Health Officer