



Contact:

Allison Adler, Director of Communications
Office: (304) 558-7899
allison.c.adler@wv.gov

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Findings of Emergency Department Record Review from Elk River Chemical Spill

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources Bureau for Public Health today released results from the medical chart review of patients who presented to 10 area hospital emergency departments in the 9 counties affected by the Elk River chemical spill between January 9 and 23, 2014.

West Virginia's Bureau for Public Health and scientists from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reviewed 584 charts to understand why people were going to the emergency department and whether any of the illnesses reported were serious. A total of 369 records were included in the analysis, representing patients who had symptoms and reported they were exposed to the water. Excluded from analysis were 213 records that did not include mention of exposure to MCHM-contaminated water, had no illness recorded, included a diagnosis unrelated to exposure to MCHM, noted that the individual left the hospital before being seen by a doctor, or were duplicates. Findings included these:

- The most common symptoms reported were nausea, rash, vomiting, abdominal pain, and diarrhea.
- The most common ways people were exposed to the water were bathing, showering, washing hands, or other skin contact.
- 356 (96.5%) of 369 persons were treated in the Emergency Department for their symptoms and released; some treatments included IV fluids and/or medications for nausea or itching.
- 13 (3.5%) of 369 persons were hospitalized; these admissions were of persons with chronic illnesses such as kidney, liver or lung disease.

"This analysis found that the symptoms reported by people exposed to MCHM in water appeared to be mild and short-lived which were resolved with minimal or no treatment," said Dr. Loretta Haddy, West Virginia State Epidemiologist and Director of the Office of Epidemiology and Prevention Services. "On the basis of the records provided by the hospitals, it was not possible to say that the illnesses were caused by exposure to MCHM."

The findings add to what is known about the possible health effects experienced by people living in the affected counties. The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources will use the medical records review and the results of the recently conducted Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response (CASPER) survey, which measures the health, economic, and other impact on the community as a whole, to make recommendations to

strengthen emergency response in the future. West Virginia and CDC are also continuing to evaluate the data and will produce a scientific paper.

The findings of the investigation are available at www.wvdhhr.org.

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