

March 7, 2019

To: Edmonton Zone Physicians

Dear Colleagues,

As you may be aware, there has been a recent update regarding contamination at a former wood treatment site (Domtar) in north Edmonton. This announcement is a follow-up to the initial work undertaken in spring 2018 by the Government of Alberta.

The most recent information has verified numerous areas of contamination, throughout the parcels of land, almost entirely on the areas that have had exposure control measures in place since last spring. Alberta Health Services has not been made aware of any immediate health concerns that may be related to exposure to chemicals in the soil or groundwater at the sites. AHS Cancer Control and Alberta Health have, however, done a preliminary comparison of the rates of cancer, miscarriages and birth defects in the surrounding neighbourhoods. This initial analysis found no difference between rates in the area near the former Domtar site compared to other parts of the province, with the exception of three types of cancer. Among people who had lived in the area for 10 or more years, there were:

- 34 cases of breast cancer in women (16 to 31 cases would be expected)
- 14 cases of endometrial cancer in women (3 to 9 cases would be expected)
- 22 cases of lung cancer in men (6 to 14 cases would be expected)

No differences in any childhood cancers were found compared to other parts of the province.

Although this data shows correlation, not causation, it requires further investigation, and will undoubtedly cause worry among your patients who reside, or have previously lived, in this area.

To support an examination of these increased numbers of specific cancers, Alberta Health will be working with provincial and national cancer and epidemiologic experts. They will be undertaking an investigation within the geographic area. This investigation will entail a thorough look at possible upstream causes of these cancers, which can include genetics, lifestyle, medications like hormone replacement therapy, and/or environmental exposures.

As updates to the residents in this area continue, I would suggest you take the following actions with your patients:

1. Continue to encourage preventive health interventions, like:
  - a. Reducing tobacco use,
  - b. Promoting physical activity to maintain a healthy weight,
  - c. Reducing consumption of harmful alcohol use and
  - d. Consuming a healthy diet, with an emphasis on plant sources.
2. As a precautionary approach specific to early breast cancer detection, please consider the following early screening intervention for breast cancer:
  - a. discussing the risks and benefits of screening mammography starting at the age of 40 for women who have resided in the immediate geographic area for more than ten years

More information, and a map of the area of concern, visit: <http://aep.alberta.ca/land/programs-and-services/reclamation-and-remediation/contaminant-management/special-projects/domtar/default.aspx> and [www.ahs.ca/domtar](http://www.ahs.ca/domtar)

It is expected that as more information is gathered, health related recommendations may change in the upcoming months to years. We commit to ongoing communication as the information evolves.

Sincerely,

Dr. Christopher Sikora, MD MPH MSc CCFP FRCP(C)  
Lead Medical Officer of Health – Edmonton Zone  
Associate Zone Medical Director - Family Medicine, Continuing Care and Addictions & Mental Health  
Alberta Health Services