

Health woes linger in Trade Center workers: study

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By Martin Downs

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - A new study shows that many workers and emergency responders who volunteered in New York after the September 11th terrorist attacks have had lingering health problems related to their rescue, recovery, and cleanup work.

In a press conference today, officials at the Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York announced early results of the ongoing study, which has provided free screening examinations and medical referrals to about 3,500 workers and emergency personnel to date. The data presented today came from exams of 250 people who worked at Ground Zero and the Staten Island landfill following the destruction of the World Trade Center, where they were exposed to hazardous particles in the dust and debris. This group was selected randomly from the first 500 people to participate in the study.

Ten months to one year after September 11, 2001, 73% had symptoms or abnormal findings in physical exams indicating ear, nose, and throat problems. Doctors also saw evidence of lung disease in 57% of them.

Fifty-two percent of those screened reported symptoms of mental health problems that required further evaluation, and about one quarter reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Approximately two thirds of those screened had not received any medical care for their conditions before participating in the study.

Robin Herbert, one of the Mount Sinai program directors, called the findings "alarming," and said the study "clearly demonstrates the need for immediate screening of WTC responders."

"Even more important is to find the conditions that they will develop early enough so that treatment makes a difference," said Stephen Levin, medical director of the Mount Sinai-Irving J. Selikoff Center for Occupational and Environmental Medicine.

So far, Mount Sinai's program has received \$12 million in federal funding-enough to screen 9,000 of an estimated 35,000 who took part in rescue and recovery efforts by July of this year, when the study is scheduled to wrap up. But politicians, doctors, and union representatives who spoke today said more people should be screened; those who are ill should be monitored longer, and that they should receive treatment in addition to screening.

Senator Hillary Clinton (D, NY) said she would pressure the White House to release another \$90 million in federal funds to continue efforts to screen workers and emergency personnel, and to provide treatment. She emphasized the national nature of the issue, given that many people came from outside New York to work at the site.

"This is some of the most important work being done anywhere in our country right now," Clinton said. "This is an American priority to take care of these brave men and women."

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) a division the CDC, has helped support Mount Sinai's program.

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