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Mount Sinai to Announce Preliminary Findings of Medical Health Screening Program for WTC-Site Responders

Analysis Reveals Over 50% of Responders Experience Pulmonary, ENT and/or Mental Health Symptoms One Year Following NY Terrorist Attacks

New York – Today, Mount Sinai physicians announced official preliminary findings of a federal medical screening program developed to evaluate health problems and hazardous exposures experienced by worker and volunteer emergency responders in New York in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks.

Coordinated by the Mount Sinai-Irving J. Selikoff Center for Occupational and Environmental Medicine at Mount Sinai Medical Center, with the support of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the program - *The World Trade Center Worker & Volunteer Medical Screening Program* - offers free and confidential medical screening examinations nationwide for exposed workers and volunteers - individuals whose tireless post-September 11 efforts in the rescue, recovery and cleanup work at Ground Zero and the Staten Island landfill exposed them to a wide range of environmental hazards and placed them at risk for resultant health problems.

An analysis of the physical examination findings, symptoms and hazardous exposures experienced by an initial group of 250 WTC Program participants documents that approximately half of the sample experienced persistent WTC-related pulmonary, ENT and/or mental health symptoms 10 months to one year following the New York terrorist attacks. These results indicate the need for medical treatment and a long-term monitoring program.

The findings were released by Dr. Kenneth Berns, CEO and President of Mount Sinai Medical Center and WTC Program Directors Drs. Stephen Levin and Robin Herbert at a major press conference at the New York City medical center with Congressional and federal agency and labor leaders in attendance.

“These preliminary results demonstrate the importance of the screening program, given the documented persistent effects on the physical and psychological health of the WTC workers and volunteers,” said Dr. Levin, who also serves as Medical Director of the Mount Sinai-Irving J. Selikoff Center for Occupational and Environmental Medicine. “The findings also point to the

need for treatment resources and for short-and long-term follow-up. The earlier these WTC-related illnesses are detected and treated, the more likely that treatment will prevent long-term illness and disability,” he said.

Major findings of the preliminary analysis include:

- 78% of participating emergency responders reported at least one WTC-related pulmonary symptom that first developed or worsened as a result of their WTC-related efforts; 46% of the sample still experienced at least one pulmonary symptom in the month before the screening examination.
- 88% reported at least one WTC-related ear, nose or throat (ENT) symptom; 52% of the sample still experienced at least one ENT symptom in the month before the screening examination.
- 52% reported mental health symptoms requiring further mental health evaluation; approximately 1 in 5 of the sample reported symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Most striking is the fact that a large proportion of this sample showed evidence (either symptoms or abnormal test results) of respiratory disease 10 months to one year after September 11, 2001. Seventy-three percent of the sample had either ENT symptoms or abnormal physical examination findings or both. Similarly, 57% of the sample had either pulmonary symptoms or an abnormal pulmonary function test or both.

“The high prevalence of pulmonary, ENT and mental health symptoms among WTC-site workers some 10 months to a year following the September 11 terrorist attacks is alarming,” said Dr. Robin Herbert, who also serves as Medical Co-Director of the Mount Sinai-IJ Selikoff Center. “Our preliminary findings clearly demonstrate the need for the immediate screening of WTC-responders, as well as the provision of medical follow-up. Our findings are consistent with the findings from a number of related health studies, including government-funded analyses, all of which support the urgency of providing appropriate health services for these workers,” she added.

“Clearly, Mount Sinai’s findings demonstrate the value of this NIOSH-funded screening program for identifying, characterizing, and addressing the chronic health problems experienced by some WTC workers,” said NIOSH Director John Howard, M.D. “The preliminary data also will help inform ongoing research and recommendations to protect emergency responders and others from hazards associated with catastrophic incidents.”

Data presented were analyzed on a random sample of 250 WTC Program participants selected from the first 500 WTC-responders to participate. To date over 3,500 WTC-responders have been screened as part of the existing one-year program, scheduled to conclude in July 2003.

Only about one-third of the sample participants had received any prior medical care for their symptoms and conditions before participating in the screening program, emphasizing the critical need for medical screening. To date, federal funding has been received to support a total of 9,000 medical screening examinations, one each for 9,000 of an estimated 40,000 plus responders that have been estimated to have participated in post September 11, 2001 efforts at Ground Zero.

Further follow-up of affected workers is also clearly indicated in order to monitor the chronic nature and severity of these health problems and to assure that proper treatment is received.

“In the wake of the September 11 attacks, tens of thousands of brave men and women selflessly put themselves in harm’s way to help others. Providing appropriate screening and follow-up is the very least we can do for them,” said Dr. Philip Landrigan, Chair of the Mount Sinai Department of Community and Preventive Medicine. “Every one of us at Mount Sinai are grateful to our leaders in New York and Washington whose efforts make this program possible.”

The twelve million dollars in initial federal funding was secured for the one year screening program through the efforts of Senator Hillary Clinton with the support of Senator Charles Schumer, New York’s Congressional leaders in the House, and labor leaders.

The medical screening program was established after months of planning in July 2002 to provide free medical assessments, diagnostic referrals and occupational health education for workers and volunteers exposed to hazards of the World Trade Center site and/or Staten Island landfill in New York City in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 in the course of their efforts in rescue and recovery, restoration of essential services, clean up and/or debris removal.

WTC Program services are provided by a consortium of occupational medicine centers in the New York metropolitan region and nationwide under the auspices of Mount Sinai’s Center for Occupational and Environmental Medicine working in conjunction with the Association of Occupational and Environmental Clinics (AOEC).

Workers and volunteers interested in obtaining more information or registering for the program are asked to call the WTC Program phone bank at 1-888-702-0630.

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