March 2012

Spring is the time of year when flowers and trees bloom and bud, but in the process, they cause people to encounter allergy issues that can sometimes be severe. However, most people have to continue their daily activities, including work, in the midst of battling these allergic reactions. So, for this month’s issue of Health and Safety News, information was taken from the CDC and NIOSH’s website under the Workplace Safety & Health Topics section related to asthma and allergies. The sites provide useful knowledge that can be beneficial to anyone who has to deal with one or both of these health issues. For more information related to these or similar subjects, please visit the CDC/NIOSH website (http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/asthma/).

Also, another topic covered in this issue is spring break. March is the month when schools typically close for a week and allow faculty and students time to regroup and prepare to make the push to the end of the semester. Sometimes people will use this week to vacation, so there is information that parents, students, and families in general might be able to use as a reference for the upcoming break. For further details related to this topic, visit the CDC’s website (http://www.cdc.gov/Features/SpringBreakTravel/).

Also, to read more about any topic in blue, either double click the link or right click on the topic and select open hyperlink.
Overview

Millions of people suffer from allergies caused by everyday exposures to agents such as dust mites, cat dander, and pollens. Agents encountered by workers can also cause allergic problems such as asthma, nasal and sinus allergies, hives, and even severe anaphylactic reactions. Examples of these work-related agents include animal proteins, enzymes, flour, natural rubber latex, and certain reactive chemicals. Asthma is one of the more serious problems that can be caused by work-related allergy. It can cause recurrent attacks of symptoms such as wheezing, chest tightness, shortness of breath, and coughing. In severe cases, these symptoms can be disabling. Fortunately, when potential hazards are recognized, work-related allergies and asthma can often be prevented or their effects minimized.

NIOSHTIC-2 Search

NIOSHTIC-2 Search Results on Asthma and Allergies
NIOSHTIC-2 is a searchable bibliographic database of occupational safety and health publications, documents, grant reports, and journal articles supported in whole or in part by NIOSH.

Research Updates

Workplace Exacerbation of Asthma a Research Priority: NIOSH Leads Research on Workplace Exacerbation of Asthma
NIOSH is expanding partnerships and research to address emerging concerns about workplace exacerbation of asthma. This includes six articles in peer-reviewed journals, a textbook chapter, and ongoing discussions with partners about a possible international collaborative study and the development of preventive strategies.

Prevention of Occupational Asthma

The Prevention of Occupational Asthma Web site is designed as a resource for individuals interested in occupational asthma (OA) prevention. Includes a searchable database of journal articles describing OA prevention studies; an introductory page with guidance on using the site; and a primer discussing the current and future state of OA prevention research.
NIOSH Publications Selected to Highlight

Preventing Asthma and Death from MDI Exposure During Spray-on Truck Bed Liner and Related Applications
DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2006-109 (September 2006)
This Alert summarizes four case reports: one death and several incidents of asthma or other respiratory disease following exposure to MDI during spray-on truck bed lining operations.

National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA)
Asthma & Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

Preventing Allergic Reactions to Natural Rubber Latex in the Workplace
DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 97-135 (June 1997)
En Español
NIOSH Alert: Workers exposed to latex gloves and other products containing natural rubber latex may develop allergic reactions such as skin rashes; hives; nasal, eye, or sinus symptoms; asthma; and (rarely) shock.

Preventing Asthma and Death from Diisocyanate Exposure
DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 96-111 (1996)
En Español
NIOSH Alert: Workers exposed to diisocyanates may develop serious or fatal respiratory disease.

Note: (di-i’so-si’ah-nät) any of a group of compounds containing two isocyanate groups (—NCO), used in the manufacture of plastics and elastomers; they can cause sensitization and are eye and respiratory system irritants. (Dorland's Medical Dictionary for Health Consumers. © 2007 by Saunders, an imprint of Elsevier, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Preventing Asthma in Animal Handlers
DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 97-116 (January 1998)
En Español
Exposure to animals or animal products in the workplace can cause asthma and allergies.

Surveillance

DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2004-146
Provides distribution and number of work-related Asthma cases for all four SENSOR reporting States by occupation, industry, agent or exposure.

The Work-Related Lung Disease Surveillance Report
It presents up-to-date summary tables, graphs, and figures of occupationally-related respiratory disease surveillance data on the pneumoconioses, occupational asthma and other airways diseases, and several other respiratory conditions.

- Section 9, Asthma
- Appendix H, Work-Related Asthma Surveillance Guidelines
  Surveillance guidelines for State health departments on work-related asthma.
Other Related Resources

A Descriptive Study of Work-Aggravated Asthma

Allergy Society of South Africa (ALLSA)
Links to allergy news and journals, allergy database, more...

American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI)
Information for patients and professionals. Includes reports, pollen counts, more...

American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (ACAAI)

Asthma Management Model System
National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), National Asthma Education and Prevention Program (NAEPP) website

ATSDR: Case Studies in Environmental Medicine (CSEM) Environmental Triggers of Asthma
One in a series of self-instructional publications designed to increase the primary care providers knowledge of hazardous substances in the environment and to aid in the evaluation of potentially exposed patients.

CDC Press Release: Asthma Rates in U.S. Increase

CDC Topic Page: Asthma and Allergies

CDC Topic Page: Healthy Youth! Health Topics

CDC Topic Page: Asthma

NCEH Air Pollution and Respiratory Health Program

NCEH Asthma Topic Page

National Institutes of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)
Topic Page on Asthma

Work-related reactive airways dysfunction syndrome cases from surveillance in selected U.S. states
J Occup Environ Med. 2003 Apr;45(4):360-8, NLM website

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Stay Healthy and Safe on Spring Break

Getting ready for spring break is more than just picking a destination.

While you're choosing among an exotic island getaway, a ski vacation, or just a short ride down the highway, follow these steps to ensure you have a healthy and safe spring break trip.

For those Going Abroad

**Vaccination before vacation.** Before you go abroad, find out about vaccines and any health concerns at your destination. Check with the local health department or a travel medicine specialist 6 to 8 weeks before you leave the United States.

It's still flu season, and vaccines are the most important tool we have for preventing the flu. Talk with your doctor about getting a flu shot.

**Travel health insurance.** Consider health insurance if you're traveling outside the United States, because your regular carrier might not cover expenses. Coverage for emergency medical evacuation can be useful, particularly if you do extreme sports, such as mountain climbing or heli-skiing (downhill skiing on remote mountains reached by helicopter) [http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/heli-skiing](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/heli-skiing).

**Active vacations.** Whether your sport is ice climbing or reef diving, depend on reliable outfitters for success. When making reservations, ask questions to make sure you will be with properly trained guides and will be using well-maintained equipment. Don't take chances that might cause injuries—or worse.

**You are what you eat.** Tempted to indulge in the local cuisine? Food can be the best or the worst part of your international trip. In developing countries, eat only food that has been fully cooked and served hot. Avoid eating fresh vegetables and fruits, unless you can peel them yourself. Drink only bottled, sealed beverages, and steer clear of ice—it was probably made with tap water.

**Is it worth the risk?** The phrase "what happens on spring break stays on spring break" can imply that it is okay—even expected—to engage in risky behaviors that you would not normally consider in your daily life, but you should take your healthy behaviors on vacation with you:

- Use latex condoms if you have sex (see [Sexually Transmitted Diseases](#)).
- To prevent infections such as HIV and hepatitis B, don't get tattoos or piercings.
- Drink alcohol responsibly and be sure to have a designated driver.
• Remember the basics of safe driving: wear seatbelts, maintain the speed limit, and avoid distractions such as talking on the phone or texting while driving. (Using a cell phone while driving is illegal in many countries.)

Travel wise. Here are a few other reminders to ensure smart traveling:

• Wear sunscreen. Avoid overexposure to the sun by wearing protective clothing and limit time in the sun during the hottest part of the day, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.
• Swim in safe places. Before jumping in, ask about bacterial contamination, water depth, and other hazards, such as sharp rocks or coral, riptides, and dangerous sea animals.
• Pack smart and remember that prevention can be travel-sized. Carry your own stash of first-aid supplies and medications. Insect repellent and antidiarrheal medicine are musts.

Politics, politics. The US Department of State website, www.travel.state.gov, helps travelers gauge the political climate of unstable countries.

You have been busy, you have worked hard, so now relax and have a good time—you deserve it!