Child Leukemia Rates Increase Near U.S. Nuclear Power Plants

By Global Research
Global Research, June 02, 2009
Salem-News.com 18 May 2009

Region: USA
Theme: Environment, Science and Medicine

The carcinogenic effects of radiation exposure are most severe among infants and children.

(NEW YORK) – Leukemia death rates in U.S. children near nuclear reactors rose sharply (vs. the national trend) in the past two decades, according to a recent study.

The greatest mortality increases occurred near the oldest nuclear plants, while declines were observed near plants that closed permanently in the 1980s and 1990s. The study was published in the most recent issue of the European Journal of Cancer Care.

The study updates an analysis conducted in the late 1980s by the National Cancer Institute (NCI). That analysis, mandated by Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA), is the only attempt federal officials have made to examine cancer rates near U.S. nuclear plants.

U.S. Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said

> "Nothing is more important to American families than the health of their children. It is critical that we continue to improve our understanding of the causes of child leukemia and learn how this heartbreaking disease be prevented, therefore this study deserves critical consideration."

Actor and advocate Alec Baldwin said:

> "exposure to ambient levels of radiation near nuclear reactors used by public utilities has long been suspected as a significant contributor to various cancers and other diseases." Baldwin, who has a long-standing interest in radiation health issues, adds "nuclear power is not the clean, efficient energy panacea to which we are presently being reintroduced. It is dirty, poses serious security threats to our country, and is ridiculously expensive. Nukes are still a military technology forced on the American public with a dressed up civilian application."

Study authors were epidemiologist Joseph Mangano MPH MBA, Director of the Radiation and Public Health Project and toxicologist Janette Sherman MD of the Environmental Institute at Western Michigan University. They analyzed leukemia deaths in children age 0-19 in the 67 counties near 51 nuclear power plants starting 1957-1981 (the same counties in the NCI study). About 25 million people live in these 67 counties, and the 51 plants represent nearly

half of the U.S. total).

Using mortality statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Mangano and Sherman found that in 1985-2004, the change in local child leukemia mortality (vs. the U.S.) compared to the earliest years of reactor operations were:

* An increase of 13.9% near nuclear plants started 1957-1970 (oldest plants)

* An increase of 9.4% near nuclear plants started 1971-1981 (newer plants)

* A decrease of 5.5% near nuclear plants started 1957-1981 and later shut down

The 13.9% rise near the older plants suggests a potential effect of greater radioactive contamination near aging reactors, while the 5.5% decline near closed reactors suggests a link between less contamination and lower leukemia rates. The large number of child leukemia deaths in the study (1292) makes many of the results statistically significant.

The Mangano/Sherman report follows a 2007 meta-analysis also published in the European Journal of Cancer Care by researchers from the Medical University of South Carolina. That report reviewed 17 medical journal articles on child leukemia rates near reactors, and found that all 17 detected elevated rates. A January 2008 European Journal of Cancer article that found high rates of child leukemia near German reactors from 1980-2003 is believed to be the largest study on the topic (1592 leukemia cases).

The carcinogenic effects of radiation exposure are most severe among infants and children. Leukemia is the type of childhood cancer most closely associated with exposures to toxic agents such as radiation, and has been most frequently studied by scientists. In the U.S., childhood leukemia incidence has risen 28.7% from 1975-2004 according to CDC data, suggesting that more detailed studies on causes are warranted.

The Radiation and Public Health Project is a non profit group of health professionals and scientists based in New York that studies health risks from radioactive exposures to nuclear reactors and weapons tests. RPHP members have published 23 medical journal articles on the topic. A copy of the child leukemia article is availale online by clicking here.

Source: Atheo News
