

LOVE CANAL MEDICAL FUND

Fall 1998

BULLETIN - HEALTH NEWS AND BENEFITS

Issue 1

The Love Canal crisis was 20 years ago. At that time we didn't know about the human health effects of many of the chemicals buried at Love Canal. Today we know much more but there are many unanswered questions that remain.

- This bulletin is the first in a series which we hope will not only keep you informed of the benefits of the Love Canal Medical Fund but also help you with information on ways to detect diseases early and how some diseases may be related to your exposures.

Information About the Plan

Some benefits for medical problems reasonably associated with exposure at Love Canal are covered by the benefit program *even if your lawsuit directly compensated you for that problem*. Such benefits apply *only to expenses you have incurred since the settlement of the lawsuit in 1985*.

Please keep in mind that covered medical problems include those which existed at the time of the lawsuit, *and also any latent illnesses which may have developed since moving from the Love Canal area*.

Pregnancy

Recently, the Medical Fund Board has received requests for information about a variety of issues relating to pregnancy. In response to these questions, we present the following information.

The Medical Fund will pay for expenses in connection with miscarriages and stillbirths of a female beneficiary, as well as for amniocentesis and sonograms. The Medical Fund will not pay for expenses in connection with normal pregnancy or maternity care.

Exposures

Love Canal residents were exposed to over 200 different kinds of chemicals. Some chemicals we know cause birth defects (such as dioxin) and some we know can cause learning disabilities (such as mercury). But we have little understanding of what the combination of chemicals can or will do during pregnancy. We also don't know what chemicals can do after exposure has stopped when the person already has a body burden or has already been affected by the chemicals.

Body Burdens

When people are exposed to fat soluble chemicals such as PCBs or dioxin, some of these chemicals are stored in the body fat. Over time, the body will rid itself of the stored chemicals, the time varying with the chemical.

When a woman becomes pregnant, some of her body fat is used to nourish the developing fetus. If there are chemicals in her body fat, they may be carried across the placenta into the developing fetus.

Breast milk is very high in fat content. When mothers who have stored chemicals in their body breast feed their children, again a portion of their body burden of chemicals is released into the milk and then into the infant.

Does this mean Love Canal children are likely to have babies with birth defects and learning disabilities?

No. It has been 20 years since exposures from Love Canal and this passing of time has likely reduced women's body burden of chemicals.

Since meat, dairy and fish all add low levels of fat soluble chemicals to the body, if your child becomes a vegetarian his or her body burden may be reduced.

Are there tests that can be taken before our children conceive that will detect a problem?

Unfortunately, there are no such tests. Even chromosome tests like the ones they took at Love Canal released in May 1980, won't tell you anything.

The broken chromosomes found at that time were likely due to on-going exposures. Blood turns over every four months and chromosomes broken in January (because of on-going exposure) would not be broken in June if exposure stopped in February.

What about genetic testing?

This type of testing can't help determine chemical related problems either. Genetic testing is useful only if you are from a background in which a particular genetic problem exists.

So what tests are available?

There is no test that can give you information before conceiving. Amniocentesis which can

be done after you are pregnant, may detect a problem early in the pregnancy. In this test a doctor withdraws some amniotic fluid from around the baby. The doctor then sends the fluid to a laboratory for analysis. Many birth defects may be identified through this procedure. However, you must be pregnant and the test itself comes with risks which your doctor should explain.

Former residents' concerns about this issue are valid. But, it's also useful to remember that several of the children born at Love Canal with the most serious birth defects and other problems, were children of two parents who were both lifetime residents of the area. In other words, both the mother and father lived in the neighborhood their entire lives, married and later had children while living in Love Canal.

Love Canal children are not likely to marry a person who lived at Love Canal their entire life. This fact reduces but does not eliminate the possibility of having a birth defected child.

Please remember, we will pay up to \$150.00 per year - per beneficiary for an annual physical.

For more information write:

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