Radiation committee confirms conclusions of North Wales childhood leukaemia studies

The National Public Health Service for Wales has welcomed a statement by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) on studies into childhood leukaemia in North Wales.

A study into childhood leukaemia, brain tumours and retinoblastoma near the Menai Straits by the Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit (WCISU) showed there was no evidence to link the diseases with nuclear discharges. This was supported by a report on Childhood Cancer Incidence in Gwynedd and Anglesey by the National Public Health Service for Wales (NPHS Wales). Both reports were responding to claims contained in a report prepared by Green Audit, an environmental consultancy and review organisation.

The COMARE statement confirms that the analysis and methodology used by WCISU and the interpretation given by NPHS Wales was appropriate. It also stated that “The Green Audit analyses have several significant weaknesses and cannot be regarded as reliable.”

Andrew Jones, Leader of the Environmental Team for NPHS Wales, said, “People living in North Wales can be reassured by this statement. There is no evidence of an increase in retinoblastoma or in tumours of the brain and spine in the Menai Straits area. Although WCISU did find levels of childhood leukaemia that were raised in the more recent period, their studies involve small numbers of cases which makes it impossible for firm conclusions to be drawn.”

John Steward, Director of the Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit (WCISU) said, “In studies involving such small numbers of actual cases it is not possible to conclude whether findings are unusual or simply due to random chance. WCISU is committed to continuing with our ongoing surveillance and geographical analysis of childhood cancers across the North Wales coastline and this has been supported by COMARE”.

COMARE has also recommended, subject to ethical and practical considerations, that further work is undertaken to investigate the apparent discrepancy in the number of cancer cases identified. WCISU is happy to explore this issue.

ENDS

ISSUED BY:  NPHS and WCISU

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