



TO: Bennington State Office Employees

FROM: Cort Lohff, MD, MPH
State Epidemiologist
Vermont Department of Health

THROUGH: Charlie Gingo, Agency of Human Services
Bennington District Field Director

RE: Employee Medical Screening

DATE: September 13, 2006

As part of the investigation of serious health concerns at the Bennington State Office building, the Vermont Department of Health – in collaboration with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) – is offering specialized medical screening tests free of charge to current building occupants.

Testing is scheduled for Tuesday, September 19 through Thursday, September 28 in Bennington.

The purpose of these tests is to help confirm preliminary findings from the employee health survey, and to provide employees with more complete and detailed information about their own respiratory health.

- **Participation in this medical screening is entirely voluntary.** However, all current building occupants (including contractors) who work more than 20 hours per week are encouraged to participate. This is an important part of the investigation. If you are not already scheduled, you may sign up with Sue Nutting, tel. 442-8138.

The following Questions and Answers provide more detail:

What tests will be performed as part of the medical screening?

- Three tests will be offered: spirometry; methacholine challenge; and DLCO. All are non-invasive screening tests used to measure various aspects of breathing and lung function.

How are these tests performed, and what do they measure?

- Spirometry involves taking a deep breath, and then blowing hard into a tube for several seconds. This test is used to measure the rate at which air is exhaled. Anyone who has an abnormal reading will be asked to inhale a medication used to open up the airways, and repeat the test.
- Methacholine challenge uses the same techniques as those used in spirometry, except that a series of increasing doses of a methacholine is inhaled. It is used to measure the reactivity of the airway.
- DLCO stands for Diffusing Capacity of the Lung for carbon monoxide (otherwise known as lung diffusion testing). This test involves inhaling a single breath of air containing a small amount of carbon monoxide, holding your breath for several seconds, and then exhaling. The amount of carbon monoxide in the exhaled air is then measured. This test is used to measure how well oxygen passes (or diffuses) from the lung into the bloodstream.

Who is eligible for this testing?

- Any current building occupant, including employees and contractors who work more than 20 hours per week, regardless of whether they have respiratory symptoms or a diagnosed disease, is eligible for testing.

Who will be performing these tests?

- Tests will be performed by expert technicians from the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) under the supervision of a physician.

When will the results be available to me?

- NIOSH will mail to each employee their individual test results three weeks following the completion of all tests.

Who will have access to my test results?

- Only investigators from the Vermont Department of Health and NIOSH will have access to individual test results. Investigators from NIOSH will review the results and then mail to each individual who was tested their personal test results. Investigators from the Health Department will link an individual's test results to their health survey and analyze that data together. However, only aggregate data – not individual data – will be reported out.

Should I take these tests even if I have no health concerns?

- **YES.** ALL current building occupants, including employees and contractors who work more than 20 hours per week are encouraged to get this testing done.

Should I take these tests if I have sarcoidosis or asthma?

- **YES.** Because these tests measure different aspects of breathing and lung function, it is important that anyone who may already be diagnosed with sarcoidosis or asthma still take these tests.

Should I take these tests if my physician has already done these?

- **YES.** For this aspect of the investigation to be successful, it is important that ALL eligible employees participate – including those who may have already had these tests done by their own physician. However, getting recent results from an employee’s physician is more useful than having no results available to the investigators at all.

Should I take these tests if I am pregnant or nursing?

- We will be receiving further information from NIOSH about whether women who are pregnant or nursing are eligible for these tests.

When and where will the tests be conducted?

- Testing will begin on Tuesday, September 19 and conclude on Thursday, September 28. Testing will take place in the Crispe Multipurpose Room at the Veteran’s Home EXCEPT for September 27 and 28. A location for September 27 and 28 is still being determined.

How do I sign up for this testing?

- You must sign up in advance to receive this testing. Sue Nutting is coordinating the scheduling. She can be contacted at 442-8138.

What do I need to do to prepare for this testing?

- All participants must review and sign off on a standard medical consent form that will be provided by NIOSH. The consent form will provide further information about these tests, including the risk and benefits to you. The consent form will be distributed by Thursday, September 14 to all employees eligible for testing.
- Review the consent form and be prepared to ask any questions. However, do not sign the consent form until you are asked to do so, just before the testing begins.
- Bring with you to the test site a list of ALL of your medications, including prescription and non-prescription inhalers (e.g. Primatene Mist™). This information is necessary to help interpret individual test results.
- Do not eat a big meal before you are scheduled to take these tests.

For further questions:

If you or your physician or health care provider have any questions, don’t hesitate to call me or Austin Sumner, MD toll-free at 800-640-4374.