

### SV40 virus and mesothelioma

C Carroll-Pankhurst et al. *British Journal of Cancer*. November (2001) Vol.85 #9 p 1295.

A few percent of mesothelioma cases cannot be attributed to asbestos exposure (no matter how fleeting). Alternative causes continue to be investigated.

Lung cancers probably have latencies before diagnosis of around 20 years (based on adult exposure experience).

Simian Virus 40 is known to cause cancer in newborn hamsters and fragments of SV 40 DNA have been found in some cancers.

Human exposure to SV 40 was not widespread but did occur by means of contaminated polio vaccine in the early 1960's.

1073 people who were vaccinated with contaminated material in the first 3 days of life 1960-62 were followed up and death certificates examined between 1979 and 1996. Comparison was made with controls from the same area.

44 deaths occurred in this population, 4 from cancer.

No sign of brain tumours, osteosarcomas or mesothelioma.

Death rate was typical.

#### Comment

35-year follow-up would seem to be appropriate in terms of latency period. However, the number in the cohort was small given that mortality in this age group will not be high. A repeat study in another 35 years time would provide more definitive results.

For the present, links between SV40 and mesothelioma would appear to remain speculative.

Asbestos is commonly found in the lungs of one-year olds. However, there is a strong relationship between degree of exposure and risk of mesothelioma. Low doses are very unlikely to result in mesothelioma.

