

CW Noonan et al. *Environ Health Persp.* (2006) Vol. 114 p 1243 – 1247.

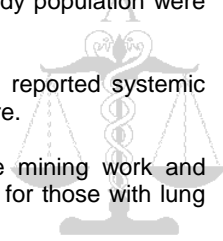
Nested Case–Control Study of Autoimmune Disease in an Asbestos-Exposed Population

The study finds weak evidence of an increased risk of rheumatoid arthritis in those with exposure to asbestos dust.

There is increasing concern that fibrotic lung disease caused by inhalation of dusts can lead to autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis. The aim of this research was to test this hypothesis for those exposed to asbestos dust in the course of vermiculite production. The study population were from Libby Montana.

A previous survey of this population had identified several hundred cases of self reported systemic autoimmune disease. Asbestos exposure in this group was assessed by questionnaire.

This preliminary report found that there was an association between vermiculite mining work and rheumatoid arthritis OR = 3.2 (95% CI = 1.3 to 7.9). An association was also found for those with lung abnormalities of a kind seen in fibrosis.



Comment

The study design was not strong and a number of analyses failed to find significant associations, i.e. results were inconsistent. Those with lung disease may also be more likely to obtain other diagnoses as a result of greater medical observation.

This was very much a preliminary study but raises the possibility of compensation claims for asbestos related lung disease to include some element of compensation for arthritis. It seems very unlikely that any claim would be for arthritis alone.
