



10 March 2005

Dear Doctor

The Ministry of Health contracted the Institute of Environmental Science and Research Ltd (ESR) to investigate non-occupational exposure to dioxins among current and former residents of Paritutu, New Plymouth.

In September 2004 the Ministry released ESR's interim report based on the blood results of 24 potentially highly exposed study participants. Subsequently a further 28 people have been tested.

You may have patients that are current or former residents of Paritutu that may contact you with concerns about their health following today's release of ESR's final report to the Ministry of Health. The final report confirms the interim report's finding of significantly elevated serum dioxin (TCDD) levels above those of the general New Zealand population in a selected group of Paritutu residents.

The study participants have already been visited, or will be today, and informed of their results. Participants who received their results in September have been contacted by telephone to advise them of the final report's release and its findings.

If patients contact you for advice, they will be looking for general reassurance, probably in relation to cancers. I recommend that, apart from responding to any symptoms, they be given general advice about reducing their cancer risk such as tobacco consumption, nutrition and participation in cancer screening programmes (such as breast and cervical screening). Blood testing for dioxins is not recommended as this test cannot be used to predict whether health effects will develop or not. The tests are costly and require a large amount of blood to be taken.

To date there is no clear indication of increased disease rates in the Paritutu population attributable to dioxins. Current data limitations mean the possibility of a small increased risk cannot be excluded. The Ministry of Health is currently undertaking further work looking at trends in cancer mortality and incidence, and birth defects in New Plymouth.

It is possible that the TCDD levels found may have health consequences for individuals or may cause increased rates of disease, in particular cancer, on a population basis. The extent of the cancer risk is highly uncertain but based on the evidence to date from the more highly exposed International Agency for Research on Cancer occupational cohort and the Seveso general population cohort it is estimated that it may be up to 10% above the national all cancer mortality rate.

The former Ivon Watkins-Dow, now Dow AgroSciences, chemical plant located in Paritutu, New Plymouth manufactured the herbicide 2,4,5-trichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4,5-T) from 1962 to 1987. Trichlorophenol (TCP), which is an intermediate in 2,4,5-T manufacture, was manufactured on site from 1969. During TCP manufacture, TCDD is formed and remains as a contaminant in 2,4,5-T.

A summary of the study and its results, and fact sheet about dioxins are attached for your information. For further information please contact your local Medical Officer of Health, the Ministry of Health website (<http://www.moh.govt.nz/dioxins>), or 0800 555 567.

If patients who lived in Paritutu between 1962 and 1987 wish to put their name and address on a mailing list so that they receive information in the future they should ring 0800 555 567.

Yours sincerely

Dr Don Matheson  
**Deputy Director General, Public Health**