

3rd wave of ills from WTC seen

MOUNT SINAI DOCS FEAR NEW CANCERS

BY JORDAN LITE

DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Posted Thursday, May 31st 2007, 4:00 AM

Responders to the 9/11 terror attacks could face a devastating "third wave" of illnesses - blood and lymphatic cancers - related to their exposure to Ground Zero air, says the director of the largest treatment program for those workers.

Though many scientists have cautioned that it's too soon to link cancers to toxins at the site, doctors at Mount Sinai's World Trade Center medical monitoring program are now seeing surprising cases of plasma-cell cancers in people who were there, said Dr. Robin Herbert.

"We know we have a handful of cases of multiple myeloma in very young individuals, and multiple myeloma is a condition that almost always presents later in life, so that's the kind of odd, unusual and troubling finding that we're seeing already," Herbert said in an online audio interview in advance of today's issue of the New England Journal of Medicine.

Doctors at Mount Sinai are trying to verify cases of leukemia and lymphoma reported by any of the more than 20,000 responders they've examined, she said.

More than 120 people with those cancers are part of a class-action lawsuit alleging negligence by the city and its contractors at Ground Zero, said lawyer David Worby.

"People are afraid of the C-word, cancer. It's taken hundreds of people getting sick this way for Mount Sinai to say, 'We are more than concerned,'" Worby said. "Washington and Mount Sinai should draw up an entire platform of blood tests and precancer tests."

Herbert was unavailable for an interview, but in the Journal she described three waves of post-9/11 illnesses.

The first was the stubborn, dry "World Trade Center cough" stemming from pulverized cement there and seen in the months just after the disaster.

The second wave involves chronic respiratory diseases that cause lung inflammation and scarring.

Cancers could be the third wave among responders exposed to asbestos, dioxins and other carcinogens at Ground Zero, Herbert said.

Although the "full range" of those toxins will never be known, "you really worry when you have a mix of chemicals about the possibility of [a] synergistic effect," she said.

jlite@nydailynews.com