

NIOSH WILL OFFER SURFACE COAL MINERS FREE, CONFIDENTIAL SCREENING FOR COAL WORKERS' PNEUMOCONIOSIS

Beginning in March 2011, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) will continue a series of free, confidential health screenings to surface coal miners throughout the U.S. The screenings are intended to provide early detection of coal workers' pneumoconiosis, also known as black lung, a serious but preventable occupational lung disease in coal miners caused by breathing respirable dust.

The health screenings will be provided by NIOSH through a state-of-the-art mobile testing van at convenient community and mine locations. Locations, dates, and other details are being finalized. Similar screenings were offered in 2010.

“It is critical to detect coal workers' pneumoconiosis as early as possible, to guide intervention and keep the disease from advancing to stages in which it becomes progressively debilitating and life-threatening,” said NIOSH Director John Howard, M.D. “The screening offered by NIOSH is designed to serve that purpose. As a source of data through which scientists may identify trends in cases, it is also a vital component of efforts by NIOSH and its partners to protect miners at risk and eliminate coal workers' pneumoconiosis once and for all.”

NIOSH will provide the health screening for surface coal miners under its Enhanced Coal Workers' Health Surveillance Program. Traditionally, NIOSH has provided the program for health surveillance of underground coal miners. The screening this year and last year for surface coal miners reflects concerns by NIOSH and stakeholders that surface coal miners are also at risk for occupational lung disease through exposure to respirable dust.

The screening provided by NIOSH will include a work history questionnaire and a chest x-ray. Blood pressure screening will be offered as well. Typically, the process takes about 15 minutes. NIOSH provides the individual miner with the results of his or her own screening, but by law each person's test results remain entirely confidential.

The prevalence of coal workers' pneumoconiosis among long-term underground miners who participated in chest x-ray screening decreased from the 1970s to the 1990s. However, the rate of disease in underground miners participating in the NIOSH program has recently increased.

The current rate for underground miners participating in the NIOSH Program and having a tenure in coal mining of at least 25 years is 9 percent nationally, double the rate in 1995. Knowing the frequency of the disease and who may

be at risk is important for determining how to prevent new cases. Consequently, information regarding disease in surface coal miners is crucial.

NIOSH encourages miners and their families to find out additional information about the Program at the following website: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/surveillance/ORDS/ecwhsp.html> or via the toll free number **1-888-480-4042**.

Among other resources available from NIOSH is the educational video, “Faces of Black Lung,” in which two miners with CWP share their personal accounts and provide insight on how their lives changed due to this devastating disease. <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/video/2008-131/>.

NIOSH is the federal agency that conducts research and makes recommendations to prevent work-related injuries, illnesses, and deaths. Under the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977 and predecessor legislation, NIOSH has been conducting health surveillance to better understand and prevent coal workers’ pneumoconiosis for nearly 40 years. The health surveillance outreach for coal miners is part of a strategic NIOSH program of research and recommendations to prevent occupational illnesses, traumatic injuries and deaths, catastrophic fatalities, and long-term, disabling injuries in mining.

More information on NIOSH is available at www.cdc.gov/niosh.

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