

Research money goes to study fatal fungus

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WASHINGTON (AP) _ Researchers are getting government help with their quest for clues about a slimy, black fungus that has killed 10 Ohio children.

The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention together are contributing \$76,000 toward research of a toxic mold that has sickened at least 60 infants nationwide.

``The urgency and importance of this study is one that really required attention early," Dr. George Malindzak of NIEHS said Wednesday.

The mold can cause the growing lungs of both human infants and baby mice to hemorrhage - a condition called pulmonary hemosiderosis.

Dr. Dorr Dearborn of Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine recognized the relatively high incidence of the affliction in the Cleveland area in 1994 and documented 34 local cases since then, with the most recent case diagnosed Monday.

``We don't understand the apparent prevalence in Cleveland," Dearborn said earlier this week.

Dearborn also has demonstrated that mice developed the same class of symptoms as humans, making laboratory research feasible, Malindzak said.

The mold, called ***Stachybotrys*** atra, grows on water-soaked paper and wood products and releases spores into the air. The spores contain a toxin that appears to be particularly damaging to infants' growing lungs.

When the weakened children are then exposed to something that stresses their lungs, like secondhand cigarette smoke, they develop chronic coughs, congestion, nose bleeds, anemia, and they cough up blood.

The latest occurrence of pulmonary hemosiderosis was confirmed Monday in a girl born in April in Lake County, Ohio.

Last week, a 4-month-old girl from a Cleveland suburb became the 10th baby to die from the disorder. Malindzak said health officials were not sure how many children in other areas may also have died the same way.

In Cleveland, health officials have been advising homeowners to fix water damage promptly and clean moldy surfaces with a mixture of soapy water and bleach.

Children with the ailment are treated with steroids and removed from the houses where they were exposed to the mold.

Before this year, the fungus had been known to cause internal bleeding in animals but had not been linked to human bleeding.

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