

# Other respiratory diseases

Farmer's lung and other allergic alveolitis; Allergic rhinitis and Byssinosis

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# Summary

The information in this document relates to Health and Safety statistics for 2010/11. The document can be found at: [www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/respiratory/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/respiratory/index.htm)

## Farmer's lung and other allergic alveolitis

- There have been fewer than 5 new assessed cases for Industrial Injuries and Disablement Benefit (IIDB) each year over the past decade.
- Over a similar period, there have been typically fewer than 10 deaths a year in the last few years.
- Between 20 and 50 estimated new cases are reported to specialists each year (THOR-SWORD).

## Allergic rhinitis

- There were 35 new IIDB cases of allergic rhinitis in 2010; there has been downward trend in annual numbers since 1996/97.

## Byssinosis

- New IIDB cases of byssinosis have been in single figures for more than the last decade.
- In a similar period, there have been fewer than 5 deaths each year.

## Farmer's lung and other allergic alveolitis

Allergic alveolitis is the general term for a group of diseases characterised by an allergic reaction to organic material. Farmer's lung, which arises from the inhalation of dust or spores arising from mouldy hay, grain and straw, is the most common form of the disease. There have typically been fewer than 5 new assessed cases for disablement benefit each year over the past decade, although in 2008, 2009 and 2010 there were 15, 5 and 5 new cases respectively (Table IIDB05 [www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/iidb05.xls](http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/iidb05.xls)). The number of deaths where farmer's lung (or a similar condition) was recorded as the underlying cause is generally of a similar order of magnitude: typically fewer than 10 deaths a year in the last few years, as shown in Table DC01. The disease only rarely progresses to a life-threatening level, and this suggests that there are substantially more cases than those receiving compensation.

Evidence from SWORD/OPRA ([www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/sources.htm#thor](http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/sources.htm#thor)) supports this with the estimated number of new cases fluctuating between about 20 and 50 per year over the last 10 years with no obvious trends. The number of new cases in 2009 was 52, but fell to 28 in 2010. Almost all of these cases were seen by respiratory physicians (Table THORR01 [www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/thorr01.xls](http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/thorr01.xls)). In most years, numbers of THOR cases were substantially higher than the numbers of Disablement Benefit cases. One possible explanation for the small number of compensated cases is that farmers, who constitute the largest group of sufferers, are often self-employed and therefore ineligible for compensation.

## Allergic rhinitis

From March 1996 the definition of the prescribed disease called 'inflammation or ulceration of the upper respiratory tract or mouth' was redefined by the Department for Work and Pensions as 'allergic rhinitis', with a list of recognised prescribed agents as for asthma. Under the earlier prescription any occupation exposed to harmful dust, liquid or vapour could qualify.

There were 35 assessed cases of this condition in 2009/10 (Table IIDB02 [www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/iidb02.xls](http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/iidb02.xls)). The substantial reduction in the number of cases seen in 1996/97 is likely to reflect changes both to the prescription rules and, possibly, to the method of data collection for Industrial Injuries and Disablement Benefit (IIDB) statistics.

## Byssinosis

Byssinosis is an illness associated with exposure to cotton dust with both acute and, in some cases, long-term effects. The numbers of compensated cases have been in single figures for more than the last decade (Table IIDB05 [www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/iidb05.xls](http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/iidb05.xls)). The number of death certificates per year with byssinosis recorded as the underlying cause of death has been also low in the last decade; typically, there have been fewer than five deaths, and in 2009 there was 2 deaths (Table DC01 [www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/dc01.xls](http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/dc01.xls))