Allergic alveolitis, rhinitis and byssinosis in Great Britain 2014

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Summary

The information in this document relates to Health and Safety statistics for 2013/14. The document can be found at: www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/other-respiratory/

Farmer’s lung and other allergic alveolitis

- The estimated number of new cases reported by respiratory physicians (THOR-SWORD) each year has fluctuated with no obvious trend.
- There were 53 estimated cases in 2013 compared with an average of 43 per year over the last 10 years.
- Annual deaths and Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit cases have typically been much lower: there were on average less than 10 deaths IIDB cases per year over the last 10 years.

Allergic rhinitis

- Annual Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit cases have tended to reduce in recent years with 20 new cases in 2013 compared with an average of 53 per year over the last 10 years.

Byssinosis

- Annual deaths and Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit cases continue to be very low: there were on average less than 5 deaths and IIDB cases per year over the last 10 years.
Farmer's lung and other allergic alveolitis

Allergic alveolitis is inflammation of the alveoli within the lungs caused by allergic reaction to inhaled 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. It is typically characterised by acute flu-like effects but can in some cases also lead to serious longer term effects on lung function.

There were 75 newly assessed cases for disablement benefit in total during the period 2003-2013, with 5 cases in the most recent year, 2013 (figures are rounded to the nearest 5) (Table IIDB05 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: averaging less than 10 deaths a year over the last decade (Table DC01 www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/dc01.xls). 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 THOR-SWORD (www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/sources.htm#thor) supports this with the estimated number of new cases averaging 43 per year and fluctuating between about 20 and 50 per year over the last 10 years with no obvious trends. The number of new cases seen by respiratory physicians (SWORD) cases was 25 in 2011, 56 in 2012 and 53 in 2013. (Table THORR01 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

Allergic rhinitis is inflammation of the mucous membrane of the nasal airways produced by an allergic reaction. When caused by plant pollen it is typically referred to as hay fever, but it may be caused by a wide range of other substances that can be present in workplaces, substances that can also lead to occupational asthma. Allergic rhinitis is often characterised by common cold-like symptoms such, but without a fever.

The annual number of cases assessed for IIDB has fallen over the last 10 years with 20 cases in 2013 compared with an average of 50 per year over the period 2003-2013 (Table IIDB02 www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/iidb02.xls).

Byssinosis

Byssinosis is an illness associated with exposure to cotton dust with both acute and, in some cases, long-term effects. It is typically characterised by asthma-like symptoms but can lead to irreversible reductions in lung function because of narrowed airways and lung scarring.

There are now relatively few workers employed within cotton processing in Britain and the number of cases assessed for IIDB has averaged less than 5 per year over the period 2003-2013 (Table IIDB05 www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/iidb05.xls). The number of deaths per year with byssinosis recorded as the underlying cause of death has been also low in the last decade; typically there have been five or fewer deaths a year, with a total of 24 for the decade (9 male and 15 female). There was 1 byssinosis death in 2012 (Table DC01 www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/dc01.xls).
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An account of how the figures are used for statistical purposes can be found at www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/sources.htm.

For information regarding the quality guidelines used for statistics within HSE see www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/about/quality-guidelines.htm

A revisions policy and log can be seen at www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/about/revisions/

Additional data tables can be found at www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/.

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