Other occupational lung disease in Great Britain 2017

Allergic alveolitis, byssinosis and allergic rhinitis

Contents

Other respiratory diseases 2
Farmer's lung and other allergic alveolitis 2
  Figure 1: Allergic alveolitis in Great Britain, 2006-2016 2
Byssinosis 2
Allergic rhinitis 3
Other respiratory diseases

Farmer’s lung and other allergic alveolitis

Extrinsic Allergic Alveolitis (EAA) is inflammation of the alveoli within the lungs caused by an allergic reaction to inhaled 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 have typically been around 10 new cases assessed for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB) each year over the last decade, with less than 10% of total cases among women (Table IIDB01 www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/iidb01.xlsx).

Annual deaths where farmer’s lung (or a similar condition) was recorded as the underlying cause are of a similar number, with an average of around 10 deaths per year over the last decade (Table DC01 www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/dc01.xlsx) and with 12% of total deaths among women. As the disease only rarely progresses to a life-threatening level it is likely that there are substantially more cases than those receiving compensation.

Evidence from cases reported by chest physicians in the THOR (SWORD) scheme supports this with the estimated number of new cases averaging 34 per year over the last 10 years, of which around a quarter were among women. Numbers were somewhat lower in the latest three years with 14 cases in 2014, 10 cases each in 2015 and 2016 (Table THORR01 www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/thorr01.xlsx).

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 last decade (Table IIDB01 www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/iidb01.xlsx).
www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/iidb01.xlsx). 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 18 for the decade (6 male and 12 female). There were 2 byssinosis deaths in 2015 (Table DC01 www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/dc01.xlsx).

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, but without a fever.

The annual number of cases assessed for IIDB has fallen over the last 10 years with 15 cases in 2016 compared with an average of around 30 per year over the last 10 years of which 12% were among women (Table IIDB02 www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/iidb02.xlsx).
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It is Health and Safety Executive’s responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected by National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

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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