

June 5, 2015



This letter summarizes the results of an investigation by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) in response to your concerns regarding the number of persons associated with the city of Offerle who have developed cancers.

Background

On April 1, 2015, you contacted the KDHE Bureau of Epidemiology and Public Health Informatics regarding your concerns about cancer in the city of Offerle. You mentioned that in the small community of about 200 people, you were aware of at least 20 patients diagnosed with cancer within a short period of time. You were then contacted on April 8th by a KDHE Epidemiologist to gather more information.

Subsequent to the April 8th conversation, you provided a list of 26 cancer cases known to you. This list included one melanoma and four colon, two brain, two lung, two breast, one testicular, one pancreatic, one prostate, one non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and one thyroid cancer case diagnosed between 1990 and 2015.

Investigation and Conclusions

There are certain circumstances that indicate a potential common source or cause of cancer among people thought to be part of a cluster. A suspected cancer cluster is more likely to be a true cluster, rather than a coincidence, if there is 1) a large number of cases of one type of cancer, rather than several different types, or 2) a rare type of cancer, rather than common types, or 3) an increased number of cases of a certain type of cancer in an age group that is not usually affected by that type of cancer. Based on the number and various types of cancer cases you reported, the report of two out of four colon cancer cases diagnosed within young men warranted further investigation.

The KDHE Environmental Health Officer accessed data from the Kansas Cancer Registry to assess the number of Offerle residents diagnosed with colorectal cancer between 2002 and 2011. This timeframe represents cancer diagnoses verified by the Kansas Cancer Registry and is the most recent database of certified data. The review did not find an unusual number of colorectal cancer cases, or an unusual number of colorectal cancer cases

diagnosed in young men, among Offerle residents. Furthermore, in reviewing all cancer diagnosed among Offerle residents, the investigation did not find a large number of cases of one type of cancer or rare types of cancer among Offerle residents. Based on these findings, no further investigation is warranted.

This conclusion took into consideration several observations. The types of cancers reported and the variety of the diagnoses suggests that there is not a common origin. Also, the age of the residents who were diagnosed was not unusual. Cancer is a common illness and risk increases with age so cases among older persons are less likely to be true clusters. According to the National Cancer Institute, approximately 39.6% of men and women will be diagnosed with cancer at some point in their lifetimes. Finally, when determining whether living in a certain geographical area, like a city or town, is a risk factor, the length of time living in the area must be substantial to implicate a cancer causing hazard in the environment.

We share your concern for the health of the Offerle community. We recognize that every case of cancer is significant for the person affected and his or her family. Within the limits of available resources, KDHE is extensively involved in efforts to reduce the occurrence of cancer in Kansas and improve the care for those in whom it does occur. Staff from our Bureau of Health Promotion can provide resources to members in your community who want information on how they can reduce the risk of cancer. We at KDHE are committed to monitoring, and helping improve, the health of our communities. If you have any questions about this report, please contact the Bureau of Epidemiology and Public Health Informatics at 785-296-1415. For more information about cancer prevention, please contact the Bureau of Health Promotion at 785-296-1207.

Sincerely,



Farah S. Ahmed, MPH, PhD
Environmental Health Officer
Bureau of Epidemiology and Public Health Informatics



D. Charles Hunt, MPH
State Epidemiologist and Director
Bureau of Epidemiology and Public Health Informatics

PC: Diana Edwards, Administrator, Edwards County Health Department
Susan Mosier, MD, Secretary and State Health Officer, KDHE
Gary Mason, Deputy Secretary of Environment, KDHE
John Mitchell, Director, Division of Environment, KDHE
Paula Clayton, Director, Bureau of Health Promotion, KDHE