

April 22, 2015

Donna Cain
10115 Raven Field
San Antonio, Texas 78245

Dear Ms. Cain,

This letter summarizes the results of an investigation conducted by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) in response to your concerns regarding the number of persons associated with a neighborhood in Lansing, Kansas who have developed cancer.

Background

On April 7th, you posted a message on the Lansing Facebook page voicing your concern about the number of cancer cases associated with a neighborhood in Lansing, Kansas. This message was forwarded by staff at the Leavenworth County Health Department to the Bureau of Epidemiology and Public Health Informatics (BEPHI) at KDHE on April 13th. You were then contacted directly by the Environmental Health Officer at KDHE on April 21st to gather more information.

Initial Investigation

During the phone conversation on April 21st, you specifically mentioned being concerned about the number of breast cancer cases and exposure to radon. You had observed within the last several years seven breast cancer cases, including three within your own family, two lung cancer, one liver and one colon cancer.

Based on the number and types of cancer cases you reported, there does not appear to be an excess risk of cancer associated with this neighborhood in Lansing. Also, exposure to radon is not known at this time to be a risk factor for breast cancer. Therefore, 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 neighbors 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. Also, when determining whether living in a certain geographical area, like a neighborhood, is a risk factor, the length of time living in the neighborhood must be substantial to implicate a cancer causing hazard in the environment. Of the several cases of cancer that you mentioned, a number did not live in the neighborhood for a substantial period of time before their diagnosis.

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 usually not affected by that type of cancer. Had BEPHI staff observed one or more of these scenarios, further investigation might have been warranted.

We share your concern for the health of the Lansing 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: Jamie Miller, Administrator, Leavenworth 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