

Help for health issues following 9/11

In September of 2006, the Mt. Sinai Medical Center released a groundbreaking report that confirmed the ongoing physical health problems of rescue, recovery, and clean-up workers who responded to the 9/11 attacks on New York City. The study found that most of these responders—who had significant exposure, working an average of 171 days at Ground Zero —got sick after working at the World Trade Center site.

Among the study's findings were that after 9/11, 69% of the workers had new or worsened respiratory problems (problems affecting the lungs, such as difficulty breathing); 61% who never had such problems developed them after 9/11; and 28% had abnormal breathing tests. Nearly 60% of those who developed new or worsened symptoms still had them an average of 20 months after they started working at the WTC site. The entire study can be found at www.wtcexams.org.

Funded through a grant from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, the WTC Medical Monitoring and Treatment Program offers free, confidential medical examinations and treatment for WTC-related conditions to 9/11 responders and volunteers who worked at Ground Zero or the surrounding area. Even if you are not currently experiencing any ill effects, proper testing and monitoring can help in early detection of any illnesses that may develop.

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For more information or to make an appointment, call the toll-free hotline at **1-888-702-0630** or visit the program's website at **www.wtcexams.org**.

In addition, retirees who have symptoms they feel are due to exposure to the dust and debris resulting from the WTC collapse are eligible for the treatment program available through the Bellevue Hospital WTC Healthcare Center. Funded by the New York City Mayor's initiative and the American Red Cross Liberty Disaster Relief Fund, the program works in coordination with community groups including the Beyond Ground Zero Network, the 9/11 Environmental Action Committee, the WTC Residents Coalition, and local community boards.

Enrolled individuals are evaluated and treated for WTC-related illnesses. The program includes comprehensive medical evaluations, breathing tests, and mental health screenings. Retirees who were or are residents, WTC responders and volunteers, or downtown-area employees may contact the Bellevue Hospital WTC Healthcare Center by calling **(212) 562-1720**. Services in multiple languages are offered.

Since responders' health problems have not gone away since 9/11, ongoing monitoring is very important. Some diseases can take decades to develop, so long-term monitoring is critical. The study concluded that responders should be monitored for at least 20 to 30 years.

For individual responders, the best thing to do to protect your health is to be vigilant about following up with examinations. Ongoing monitoring can ensure that new health problems are caught early, when treatment is most effective.

If you were a first responder, lived or worked in the area, call either program today for an appointment.