

Idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis cases linked with asbestos exposure

September 9 2014

A proportion of idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF) cases may be linked with asbestos exposure, according to the results of a new study. If confirmed, the findings would mean that current treatment strategies need to be altered as people with a history of asbestos exposure are not currently able to access new treatments for IPF.

The research, which was presented at the European Respiratory Society's International Congress today (09 September 2014), provided new mortality data for IPF, asbestosis and [mesothelioma](#).

Asbestosis is the name given to the lung disease developed by people with a known history of exposure to asbestos. The symptoms and presentation of this disease can be identical to IPF; the only difference between the two diseases is whether a patient knows about their exposure to asbestos. People with asbestosis are not currently eligible for new treatments for IPF, despite the fact that these treatments work on curing an identical disease.

Researchers have suggested that a proportion of IPF may be due to unknown exposure to asbestos. They analysed mortality rates for IPF, asbestosis and mesothelioma across England and Wales. Data were obtained from the Office of National Statistics on the annual number of deaths due to IPF, mesothelioma and asbestos for the period 1974–2012, broken down by age, sex and region.

The analysis revealed national and regional correlations between the

three diseases, which supports the theory that a proportion of IPF cases are due to unknown exposure to asbestos. If this [asbestos exposure](#) was known, it would be likely that these patients were diagnosed with [asbestosis](#) rather than IPF.

There were also high rates of IPF deaths in particular regions in the North West and South East of England, which has a history of shipyard work and therefore potential exposure to asbestos dust.

Lead researcher, Dr Carl Reynolds from Imperial College London, said: "The findings are consistent with the hypothesis that a proportion of IPF cases are likely to be caused by unknown exposure to asbestos. More research is needed in this area, particularly as patients known to have asbestos exposure are not currently considered to be candidates for new treatments for IPF and this may be inappropriate."

More information: Abstract: Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis, asbestosis and mesothelioma, trends for England and Wales: is asbestos exposure associated with IPF? Tuesday 9 September, 08.30-09.30.

Provided by European Lung Foundation

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