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Can Cause Cancer

Talcum powder — so liberally dusted on almost every baby — can be a serious hazard to the health and even the lives of millions of Americans who use it, warn leading health experts.

Scientists are alarmed because recent studies show a definite link between talc (a soft mineral that forms the base of talcum powder) and several deadly forms of cancer.

One study reveals that talc miners and millers in New York state have four times more lung cancer than normal.

And an ongoing study in Britain shows talc to be present in three-fourths of ovarian cysts and half of all cervical tumors checked by scientists.

The same British researchers also found talc in every one of 12 stomach

Research Reveals Threat to Millions of Americans . . .

Talcum Powder Can Cause Cancer

tumors from Japan, which has the highest incidence of this disease in the world — and where talc is used in the preparation of rice, the nation's staple food.

"We're really worried about the use of talc in the home," admitted one health expert, Dr. Irving Selikoff of New York's Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

"Talc contains asbestos — and we already know asbestos is a cancer-causing agent. We've suspected for a long time that talc also causes cancer, and these studies seem to confirm it."

There is a very real danger involved

because the use of talc is so widespread, according to Dr. William Nicholson, associate professor of community medicine at Mount Sinai.

Dr. Arthur Langer, an associate professor of mineralogy at Mount Sinai, added: "At least 50 million Americans use some form of talc in their daily lives — and almost every baby is literally doused with it.

"When a baby is dusted with talcum powder every day, it inhales the talc — which accumulates in the body to such a degree it can't be eliminated. This could cause cancer later in life."

Talc and asbestos are both silicates

and occur together in nature. When talc is crushed into powder, the asbestos often remains, Dr. Langer said.

"An added problem," he revealed, "is that talc sometimes contains minerals like nickel or cobalt — which like asbestos are definitely cancer-causing."

Drs. Langer and Selikoff both believe talc product labels should reveal the amount of asbestos each product contains.

And Dr. Selikoff, a professor of environmental science, added: "Because of the potential danger, I definitely think people should have some way of knowing how much asbestos is in the talcum they buy."

The recent study of New York state talc workers shows that exposure to talc definitely can be harmful, said Dr. Selikoff.

"These miners and millers have four times the normal rate of lung cancer, as well as extensive lung scarring and lung tumors."

And the British study, under way in Cardiff, Wales, has established a definite relationship between talc and some tumors, according to William Henderson of Cardiff's Tenovus Institute for Cancer Research.

"Talc has been present in 75 percent of the ovarian tumors and 50 percent of the cervical tumors we've analyzed," said Henderson, one of the world's leading electron microscopists. "In addition, we've studied 12 stomach tumors from Japan — and found talc in all of them."

Henderson said talc enters the body in various ways. It can be inhaled, can enter through orifices, or can be taken in through food — "For example, the skin on salami contains talc, and some molds used in making chocolate are treated with talc to keep the chocolate from sticking."

Research specialist Dr. Arthur N. Rohl of Mount Sinai agreed talc may cause some of the same adverse effects that asbestos produces.

"Many surgeons have even stopped using talc on their surgical gloves because they've developed skin tumors — now they're using cornstarch instead," he said.

Dr. Claude Welch, president of the American College of Surgeons, confirmed Dr. Rohl's statement and added: "The use of talcum powder by surgeons on their gloves is now discouraged. There are safer things to use."

Dr. Douglas Gracey, director of Pulmonary Medical Services at Chicago's Northwestern Memorial Hospital, commented: "Talcum can be harmful. We find that people in industry who are exposed to talc often develop disabling lung diseases."

"And most commercial talcum powder contains significant amounts of asbestos fiber — which is definitely harmful in many ways."

— CHARLES MICHELINI

Talc