

Brown: The Children and Families of Clyde Deserve Answers

Brown Writes to EPA and CDC Requesting Increased Federal Assistance to Investigate Clyde Cancer Cluster

Wednesday, February 23, 2011

WASHINGTON, D.C.—U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown today called for increased federal involvement in investigating the childhood cancer cluster in Clyde, OH in order to provide answers to children and families in the area. Brown wrote to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Lisa P. Jackson and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Thomas R. Frieden requesting that their agencies provide increased federal assistance to the Ohio EPA, the Ohio Department of Health (ODH), and the Sandusky County Health Department (SCHD).

“The children and families of Clyde deserve answers,” Brown said. “Ohio’s state agencies have worked in earnest to determine the cause of the high-rates of childhood cancer in Clyde, but more needs to be done to support their efforts. Increased resources, that only the federal government can provide, should be utilized in order to determine what is going on in and around Clyde – we must do everything within our power to figure out why so many children are being diagnosed with cancer in this area.”

A cancer cluster, as defined by the National Center for Environmental Health at the CDC, is a “greater-than-expected number of cancer cases that occurs within a group of people in a geographic area over a defined period of time.” Since 1996, at least 37 children within a 12-mile wide circle have been diagnosed with brain and central nervous system tumors, lymphoma, leukemia, and other forms of cancer and four of these children have passed away.

The Ohio EPA, ODH, and SCHD have worked in cooperation to determine the cause for high rates of childhood cancer in Clyde—by meeting with families of children affected by cancer, analyzing environmental conditions in the region, conducting air monitoring throughout the region, evaluating drinking water quality, evaluating area companies’ compliance with environmental laws, and scouring existing information looking for unusual environmental conditions in the region. Despite these considerable efforts, no cause has been determined.

Brown urged Congress to pass the *Caroline Pryce Walker Conquer Childhood Cancer Act*. The bill— which passed in 2009— established a national patient registry for pediatric cancer patients at the CDC. It also authorized additional funding for pediatric cancer research at the National Institutes of Health. Although funding has yet to be allocated to the NIH, Sen. Brown continues to fight to secure money for the program. In September 2009, Brown and Sen. Voinovich sent a letter urging Congressional colleagues to direct an additional \$10 million for pediatric cancer research.

Full text of the letter is below.

February 23, 2011

Lisa P. Jackson

Administrator

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Ariel Rios Building

1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20460

Thomas R. Frieden, MD, MPH

Director

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Administrator

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

Clifton Building, Mailstop D14

Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Administrator Jackson and Director Frieden:

As the federal agencies primarily responsible for investigating and responding to suspected disease clusters, I write to ask for additional assistance and attention with respect to the childhood cancer cluster in Clyde, Ohio. I also write to request more information about efforts already underway by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with respect to this health emergency in Northwest Ohio.

The National Center for Environmental Health at the CDC defines a cancer cluster as a "greater-than-expected number of cancer cases that occurs within a group of people in a geographic area over a defined period of time." Since 1996, at least 37 children within a 12-mile wide circle have been diagnosed with brain and central nervous system tumors, lymphoma, leukemia, and other forms of cancer. Tragically, four of these children have passed away. When eight children in or near Clyde were diagnosed with cancer between 2002 and 2006 – state health experts acknowledged that this number was approximately four times what could be considered normal.

It is my understanding that the CDC and the EPA have provided a certain amount of oversight and expertise to the state agencies primarily responsible for investigating the cancer cluster in Clyde. After years of challenging and complex work at the state level – involving the Ohio Department of Health (ODH), the Sandusky County Health Department (SCHD), and the Ohio EPA – I believe it is imperative that our nation's federal agencies, with their additional resources, begin to play a larger role.

For years, the Ohio EPA, ODH, and SCHD have worked diligently together to meet with families of children affected by cancer, discuss environmental conditions in the region, and to try and determine whether any similarities exist in terms of exposure or origin. In addition, the Ohio EPA has conducted air monitoring throughout the region, evaluated drinking water quality, evaluated area companies' compliance with environmental laws, and scoured existing information looking for unusual environmental conditions in the region. To date, despite these considerable efforts, Ohio's state agencies have been unable to determine why the children of Clyde, Ohio are at an increased risk of getting cancer.

These children, and these families, deserve answers.

According to information from the EPA website, the CDC and other federal agencies are only called in to further assist with cancer cluster investigations when there is a "special situation." With at least 37 children diagnosed with cancer, four children dead, and an entire community searching for answers, I would ask the EPA and CDC to consider the Clyde cancer cluster a "special situation."

If the EPA and the CDC agreed to increase federal involvement in trying to determine the cause for high rates of childhood cancer in Clyde, what type of assistance would this entail? What, if any, other federal resources are available to help our state in this matter? Finally, please provide details as to the level of assistance that the EPA and the CDC have already provided to the state of Ohio to help investigate potential causes for these increased incidences of childhood cancer in and around Clyde.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to working with both the EPA and the CDC in the hopes of providing answers to the children and families of Clyde, Ohio.

Sincerely,

Sherrod Brown

United States Senator

CC: Theodore E. Wymyslo, MD, Director, Ohio Department of Health

Scott J. Nally, Director, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency

David G. Pollick, Health Commissioner, Sandusky County Health Department

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