



14 December 2006

## **Update on public health issues related to Polonium-210 investigation**

The Health Protection Agency is continuing to provide expert advice on the public health issues surrounding the death of Mr. Alexander Litvinenko. Throughout, our primary concern has been to protect the public.

Polonium-210 can only represent a radiation hazard if it is taken into the body – by breathing it in, by taking it into the mouth, or if it gets into a wound. It is not a radiological hazard as long as it remains outside the body. Most traces of it can be eliminated through hand-washing, or washing machine and dishwasher cycles for clothes, plates etc.

On the basis of the monitoring results received so far from a range of sites we believe that the risk to the general public of having been exposed to Po-210 is likely to be very low.

### **Radiation monitoring teams update**

Since the start of the incident response, the Agency has coordinated a total of **41** radiation monitoring teams, operating on a round the clock basis.

The two-person teams, drawn from experienced HPA radiation protection staff and specialist contractors, have checked public areas in buildings and vehicles at the invitation of the police or local authority.

Monitoring for alpha radiation is a thorough and methodical operation. This form of radiation is only detectable within a few centimetres of a given contaminated surface and the monitoring device typically has a sensitive area of only 10 by 10 cm. Monitoring teams therefore meticulously scan a room for hours at a time, slowly moving the monitor over the surface under examination and keeping it steady at a constant distance of about one cm above the surface.

The teams operate in pairs so that one member can monitor, and the other can check and record readings, and check their partner for any contamination.

### **Test results update**

The Agency's public health follow-up has included testing urine samples from those in close contact with Mr. Litvinenko, those who worked or were present in some of the affected areas and, where appropriate, those who called for advice via NHS Direct.

- **274** urine samples so far tested by the Agency have found nothing of concern. The Agency continues to contact people to inform them of their results.
- There are **8** samples which have shown exposure to some Polonium-210 (Po-210). The levels are not significant enough to result in any illness in the short term and any increased risk in the long term is likely to be very small.

- As of midnight, Wednesday December 13, NHS Direct had received a total of **3,757** calls since HPA advice was issued on Sat Nov 25;
- Of these, by 5pm Wednesday December 13, the HPA had followed up **646** people who, following assessment, needed further investigation. 204 of these people had been in the Pine Bar on 1 Nov, had already been in touch with NHS Direct and are now being re-contacted.
- The total number of people so far referred as a precaution to a specialist outpatient assessment clinic for possible radiological exposure assessment is **29** (27 from NHS Direct, and 2 via other routes). 26 of these have provided urine samples - of these **20** have so far found nothing of concern. The other 6 samples are being tested and the Agency will contact people to inform them of their results as soon as they are available

The police investigation continues. We will provide further public information as appropriate.

### Notes to Editors:

Preliminary results received from seven members of staff working in The Pine Bar of the Millennium Hotel on Nov 1 show that they appear to have had some exposure to Polonium-210.

Following this information we felt it prudent to assess any other staff working in The Pine Bar of the Millennium Hotel, on Oct 31 and Nov 2. We are working with the hotel management to try to identify any other relevant staff. We have also advised that any member of the public in The Pine Bar on Oct 31 and Nov 2 (in addition to Nov 1) contact NHS Direct on 0845 4647 who will pass on their details to the HPA for further assessment.

Our advice has also been that anyone who was in The Pine Bar on Nov 1, who has not yet contacted NHS Direct, is invited to do so.

1. The Agency is writing to offer further advice to those people who were in The Pine Bar on Nov 1 and who have already contacted NHS Direct. A special helpline, staffed by experienced HPA staff, has been set up. If requested by people in this group, a urine sample will be tested. Arrangements will be made for information to be provided to international guests.
2. Overseas visitors who were in the Pine Bar of the Millennium Hotel on Oct 31, Nov 1 and Nov 2 should email the Health Protection Agency for advice: [overseasadvice@hpa.org.uk](mailto:overseasadvice@hpa.org.uk). If you do not have access to email you can contact NHS Direct on 00 (44) 845 4647 but only via a mobile telephone if you are calling from abroad. (If this does not connect you please try 0845 46 47 instead – again only from a mobile)
3. Further information is available on [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) and [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk)
4. For the latest information on locations go to the London Resilience Team website at [www.londonprepared.gov.uk](http://www.londonprepared.gov.uk)
5. Media enquiries to HPA London press office on 020 7759 2824 or 2834 or to HPA CRCE press office on 01235 822 678 or 01235 822 744.

If you are calling out of hours please call 020 8200 4400.