



7 December 2006

Update on public health issues related to Polonium-210 investigation

The Health Protection Agency continues to provide expert advice on the public health issues surrounding the death of Mr. Alexander Litvinenko. Our primary concern has been to protect the public.

As tests established Mr Litvinenko had a significant quantity of the radioactive isotope Polonium-210 (Po-210) in his body, we have focused on those areas identified by police and which were assessed by experts to be at higher risk. These were two hospitals which treated Mr Litvinenko and the locations he visited on the day he fell ill (Nov 1) where radioactive contamination were found - the Itsu Sushi restaurant at 167 Piccadilly, London, and the Millennium Hotel, Grosvenor Square, London.

In addition to this we have also been monitoring many other locations identified by the police as part of their investigations to assess whether there is any public health risk. These include the aircraft identified, the Emirates Stadium, and several hotels and offices – our investigations have confirmed there is no public health concern in the key public areas.

As a precautionary measure we have followed up a number of staff at the Itsu sushi restaurant and the Millennium Hotel. We asked members of the public who were in the Itsu restaurant or in The Pine Bar or restaurant of the Millennium Hotel on 1 Nov to call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 for advice on what to do. NHS Direct provided the Agency with all the names and addresses of those who contacted them. Some of these we interviewed to assess whether they needed to be followed up and for all the others we have maintained their contact details.

In all of the Itsu sushi staff asked to provide urine samples we have found nothing of concern.

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 been exposed to low levels of Polonium-210. There is no health risk in the short term and in the long term the risk is judged to be very small on the basis of initial tests. All of them are assessed to have had intakes lower than the

adult family member of Mr Litvinenko for whom tests also identified they had been exposed to Po-210.

Our first priority has been to speak with these staff members and Agency experts have been explaining the results and answering any questions they may have.

Following this new information we feel it prudent to also assess those staff who were working in The Pine Bar of the Millennium Hotel, on Oct 31 and Nov 2. We are also advising that members of the public who were in The Pine Bar on the 31 Oct 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.

We also advise that anyone who was in The Pine Bar on Nov 1 and who has not yet contacted NHS Direct to do so.

The Agency is writing to provide further advice to the 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, will be set up for these NHS Direct callers to provide further advice over the next few days. If these people wish, a urine sample will be tested. Arrangements will be made for information to be provided to international guests.

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

It 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

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

Notes to Editors:

1. If you are an overseas visitor and were in the The Pine Bar of the Millennium Hotel on Oct 31, Nov 1 and Nov 2 you should email the Health Protection Agency for advice: 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)
2. Further information is available on www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk and www.hpa.org.uk

3 Media enquiries to HPA London press office on 020 7759 2824 / 2834 / 2826

or HPA CRCE press office on 01235 822 678 or 01235 822 744.

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