



9 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.

Following concerns that Mr Mario Scaramella had been in contact with a significant amount of Polonium-210 (Po-210) preliminary forensic tests were carried out. These indicated that there could be very high levels of Po-210 in Mr Scaramella's urine. Although it was recognised that tests of this nature may be imprecise, on a precautionary basis it was felt that Mr Scaramella should be immediately admitted to hospital for further investigations.

Once he was in hospital the HPA was able to carry out its own more detailed clinical tests which can take up to several days. The results have now come through and these show that Mr Scaramella has very low levels of Po-210 in his body. These would result in doses that are significantly less than that from one year's natural background radiation and are consistent with the medical findings at UCLH where he showed no signs of radiation poisoning.

Po-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 still believe that the risk to the general public of having been exposed to Po-210 is likely to be very low.

#### **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 the affected areas and, where appropriate, those who called for advice via NHS Direct.

- **225** urine samples so far tested by the Agency have found nothing of concern. The Agency will be contacting these 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 the results are reassuring in that any increased risk in the long term is likely to be very small.
- As of midnight Fri, Dec 8 NHS Direct had received **3,545** calls since HPA advice was issued on Sat Nov 25;
- Of those, as of 8pm Fri Dec 8 the HPA had followed up **265** people who it was assessed should be investigated further (due to the extension of dates to 31 Oct and 2 Nov this figure will increase – further updates will reflect this);
- The total number of people – as of midnight Fri Dec 8 - 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);
- As a precaution **76** healthcare staff have been asked to provide urine samples for testing as of 5pm Fri, Dec 8.

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

#### **Notes to Editors:**

1. 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 who also were working in The Pine Bar of the Millennium Hotel, on Oct 31 and Nov 2. We are working with the hotel management to try and identify any other relevant staff. We have also advised that any member 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.

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

2. 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.

3. 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)

4. Further information is available on [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) and [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk)

5. Media enquiries to HPA London press office on 020 7759 2824 or 2834 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.