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Public Health response to Helensburgh concerns

The Illawarra Shoalhaven Public Health Unit has completed a detailed analysis of data spanning a 15-year period, following community concerns about brain cancer rates in the Helensburgh area.

Director of Public Health, Curtis Gregory, said the investigation has found no evidence of increased rates or unusual patterns of cancer.

“It’s always an anxious time when concerns are raised about the health of local communities. We’ve looked at the data from the NSW Cancer Council Registry and found no evidence of increased incidence of newly diagnosed brain cancer within the Helensburgh area for the period 2001 to 2016.

“The rates were within what would normally be seen within a population and were similar to the rate found within the wider Australian population,” he said.

The investigation also looked at the most recent available data (2012 to 2016) to determine if there were more recent variations in the incidence of brain cancer, particularly any increases. There was no evidence that the frequency in Helensburgh was higher compared with the Australian population for this period.

In all, nine cases of newly diagnosed brain cancer were identified in Helensburgh from the start of 2001 until the end of 2016, five of those in the last five years.

Health concerns had been raised by the community around a building site in the suburb following reports of odours and possible chemical contamination.

“The Public Health Unit will provide further assistance, as required, as Wollongong City Council and the NSW Environment Protection Authority continue to look into the Helensburgh building site,” said Mr Gregory.

Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District

Media contact: Communications Unit on 4221 6861 or 0477 391 219

Afterhours 0422 003 764

www.islhd.health.nsw.gov.au