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Guidance

PHE statement on modern municipal waste incinerators (MWIs) study

Updated 15 October 2019



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The results of a [major study on modern municipal waste incinerators](#) (MWIs) have been published by the Small Area Health Statistics Unit (SAHSU) at Imperial College London.

The 2 papers - published respectively in November 2018 and May 2019 - found no evidence of an increased risk of infant mortality for children living close to MWIs.

A final paper, published in June 2019, found no evidence of increased risk of congenital anomalies from exposure to MWI chimney emissions, but a small potential increase in risk of congenital anomalies for children born within ten kilometres of MWIs.

The SAHSU authors acknowledge the increase in risk of congenital anomalies linked to distance from MWIs is the cruder of the two measures and may well be down to not fully adjusting the study for factors such as other sources of pollution around MWIs or deprivation.

A causal association between the increased risk of congenital anomalies for children born close to MWIs has not been established.

PHE's risk assessment remains that modern, well run and regulated municipal waste incinerators are not a significant risk to public health. While it is not possible to rule out adverse health effects from these incinerators completely, any potential effect for people living close by is likely to be very small.

This view is based on detailed assessments of the effects of air pollutants on health and on the fact that these incinerators make only a very small contribution to local concentrations of air pollutants.

PHE will continue to review its advice in light of new substantial research on the health effects of incinerators published in peer-reviewed journals.

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