

What is a health consultation?

A health consultation is a report that provides advice on a public health issue related to human exposure to a hazardous substance. A health consultation is a response to an environmental public health question. It is not the same as a medical exam, community health study, or public health assessment. A health consultation is a way for the Tennessee Department of Health's Environmental Epidemiology Program to respond to a need for health information about a hazardous substance and to make recommendations to protect the public's health.



A health consultation considers:

- how much (the concentration) of a hazardous substance is present at a site;
- whether people have been or might become exposed to the hazardous substance;
- what *exposure pathways*, such as breathing, touching, eating, or drinking, are present at the site or in the community;
- what harm (the toxicity) a hazardous substance might cause to people;
- whether living or working near a hazardous waste site might affect people's health; and
- other dangers to people, such as unsafe buildings, dangerous objects, abandoned mine shafts, or other physical hazards.

A health consultation often includes:

- background
- statement of issues
- discussion
- child health considerations
- conclusions
- recommendations
- public health action plan
- references
- tables and figures
- maps and photos
- certification



The Environmental Epidemiology Program is funded through a cooperative agreement with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). ATSDR is the federal public health agency whose mission is to prevent exposure and adverse human health effects and diminished quality of life associated with exposure to hazardous substances from waste sites, unplanned releases, and other sources of pollution in the environment. ATSDR describes environmental public health topics on their Website (www.ATSDR.cdc.gov).

There are 5 types of conclusions that can be used in a health consultation:

- 1. Urgent Public Health Hazard** - Evidence of short-term exposure or likely future exposure to a harmful amount of a hazardous substance that requires quick intervention to stop people from being exposed
- 2. Public Health Hazard** - Evidence of certain physical hazards or long-term exposure or likely future exposure to an amount of a hazardous substance that might result in harmful health effects



- 3. Indeterminate Public Health Hazard** - Professional judgment about the health hazard cannot be made because information critical to such a decision is missing or unavailable
- 4. No Apparent Public Health Hazard** - Evidence that exposure to a hazardous substance may have occurred in the past or might still be occurring now, but the exposure is not expected to cause harmful health effects
- 5. No Public Health Hazard** - No evidence of exposure to any site-related hazardous substance



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What happens after a health consultation is published?

A health consultation has recommendations for actions to protect the public's health. For example, recommendations can include:

- site cleanup;
- limiting access to keep people away from contamination or physical danger, for example by fencing a site; or
- community health education for residents and health care providers to inform them about site hazards, potential health effects, and ways to reduce or prevent exposure.



**If you have any questions
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