Hello Again!

As vaccines become more available, we are hopeful that the pandemic's grip on our community will ease. As we continue to adjust to these changes, we wanted to let you know that in-person biospecimen collection at UB began again on March 17 with COVID safety protocols in place. Read more about this, our new Facebook page, and more in this newsletter!

NEW!

The Study now has a Facebook page!

We'll be posting new information every week that will include educational material, up-to-date information regarding the Environmental Health Study webinars and workshops related to environmental health. Check it out at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/ubehstudy or scan the QR code.

Not a study participant yet? There's still time! Just go to our website to learn more about the project and how to participate. Questions? Give us a call at (716) 829-5625.

MEET THE TEAM

Dr. Laurene Tumiel-Berhalter is an Associate Professor and the Director of Community Translational Research in the Department of Family Medicine at the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. She has appointments in the Departments of Epidemiology and Environmental Health and Community Health and Health Behaviors in the School of Public Health and Health Professions. She is also the Director of Community Engagement for The University's Clinical and Translational Research Institute. Dr. Tumiel-Berhalter's research focuses on underserved communities where health challenges are compounded by limited resources, elevated risk factors, and multiple chronic diseases. Dr. Tumiel-Berhalter has 20 years of community-based experience and works with a network of collaborators throughout Western New York. One key partner of Dr. Tumiel-Berhalter's is the Patient Voices Network (PVN), a grassroots group of patients from underserved communities whose vision is: "A community of educated and involved patients working hand in hand with physicians in making decisions about their own health care." This group is instrumental in designing and implementing interventions to positively impact the health of residents in underserved communities and encouraging people to participate in research projects. The PVN project has created a sustainable model to improve preventative cancer screening.

In her role as a co-investigator on the Environmental Health Study (EHS) for Western New York, Dr. Tumiel-Berhalter leads the Community Engagement team. The team works with the Environmental Health Study's Community Advisory Committee (CAC), a group of community members who advise the project regarding the design and implementation of Study objectives. The Community Engagement team also works to communicate EHS study progress through the EHS newsletter, website, and Facebook page and educates the community about the connection between the environment and health through workshops and community outreach. Dr. Tumiel-Berhalter's experience in epidemiology and mixed-method community approaches guide this work.

Welcome! We want to welcome participants who completed the pilot study in 2017 into the full study!

STUDY UPDATES

Biospecimen Collection

In-person biospecimen collection at UB began again on March 17 with COVID safety protocols in place. Times of collection are Wednesdays from 3pm-6:30pm, and Thursdays 7am-10:30am. As of the end of May, 901 people have donated biospecimen samples and 154 people have completed a second donation. If you would like to donate either in-person (urine and blood) or request a collection kit mailed to you (urine and saliva), please call our research team at (716) 829-5625.

Children's Study

The Children's Study, led by Dr. Lina Mu, is continuing to receive on-line and paper surveys. The study aims to understand the health impacts from exposure to chemicals in air pollution both before and after birth. As of the end of April, 378 individual children from 294 families are enrolled in the Study. If you are interested in having your child participate, please contact the study team at (716) 829-5625 or sphhp-ehstudy@buffalo.edu .

Follow-up Survey

So far, 5,308 participants have completed the follow-up survey. **IMPORTANT!** Payment for those who opted to receive one will come by mail and be in the form of a US Bank pre-paid debit card. **Do not destroy it!** It is from our study even though the envelope does not say it's from the Environmental Health Study.

MAPPING DATA

The Environmental Health Study's focus is to determine the impact of Tonawanda Coke Corp. on the study communities. Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are a contaminant of interest because they were produced from Tonawanda Coke but also come from other industries, as well as common sources including cigarette smoke, traffic exhaust, and grilled food.

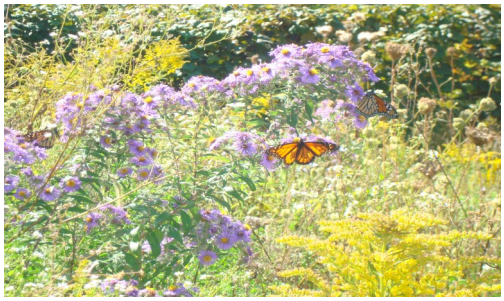
PAHs are a class of environmental contaminants, and some PAH's are known to be carcinogenic to humans. Some are associated with conditions such asthma and COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease).

In order to understand the role of Tonawanda Coke in PAH contamination, we need to consider PAH emission from all sources. Assessing the contribution of non-industrial PAH contaminant exposure is an essential first step.

The current work of the research team is to build an air pollution model that shows the distribution of PAHs in the study area. The model will use mathematical formulations, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and data from federal, state, and local sources in order to predict PAH distribution. The team is now in the process of gathering and mapping data. One map of heavy industrial traffic on major roadways in the study area shows that the highest truck/heavy vehicle traffic is the section of I-190 near Tonawanda Coke. This information, when combined with other data sources, will help us understand the sources and locations of PAH exposure.

Image by Schwoaze from Pixabay

Website update! If you haven't looked at our website in a while, it's time to take a look! We've been adding new resources and making the pages easier to read. Look for our workshop videos under the Resources tab and many new links with information we hope you'll find helpful! Visit ehstudy.buffalo.edu or scan the QR code.



Spring Spotlight

Healthy Yards, Healthy Bodies

Spring is here! After the long winter, we're starting to think about our lawns and gardens!

We can have thriving lawns and gardens that are also safe for our family, pets and environment. Did you know that U.S. homeowners use about 70 million pounds of pesticides on their lawns every year? These applications are estimated to kill 7 million wild birds annually. They also impact our water - the U.S. Geological Survey found that every stream they sampled had at least two pesticides and every fish sample had at least one. Most of the pesticides found were those used for lawns (https://ny.audubon.org/conservation/lawn-pesticides)

Commonly used pesticides have been associated with cancer, endocrine disruption, nervous system toxicity, reproductive effects and kidney and liver damage. Children are especially vulnerable because their brains, nervous system and other organs are still developing. Their behavior- crawling, putting their hands in their mouth, playing on the grass- puts them at greater risk of exposure. Pets are also at risk.

There are safer options for lawn and garden care including integrated pest management (IPM). IPM minimizes the use of pesticides and uses the least toxic chemicals as a last resort. For more on this topic and great local resources to get you started, check out our on-line workshop: "Pesticides Part 2: Safer Lawn and Garden Care" at https://ehstudy.buffalo.edu/ehresources/workshopsehs

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