

# Diagnostic Work-Up for Chronic Beryllium Disease

## WHAT CAN I EXPECT IF I GET THE ADDITIONAL MEDICAL PROCEDURES NEEDED TO CONFIRM A DIAGNOSIS?

Based on results of your screening examination, you may be offered additional medical tests. These tests will help to determine whether you have a health problem, and if it is Chronic Beryllium Disease.

A specialist in lung disease (pulmonologist) will ask you questions about your health and perform a comprehensive examination, with special emphasis on your lungs, where Chronic Beryllium Disease is found. The function of your lungs will be tested by a specialized version of spirometry, the test where you blow into a tube. If the degree of change to your lungs is still uncertain, you may be offered a high-resolution CT scan or other imaging study to provide a picture of your lungs.

One procedure you may be offered is called a *bronchoscopy*, which allows the doctor to look directly into your lungs with a fiberoptic device. The doctor passes a flexible tube

through your nose into your throat and windpipes, which, using the fiberoptic "eye," inspects the lungs. Some cells (lymphocytes) will be washed out and later tested to see if they are sensitized to beryllium. The doctor can also take small samples of tissue; these are examined at a laboratory later.

Before the bronchoscopy, you will be given a local anesthetic to numb both your nose and throat. During the procedure you may be given a relaxant intravenously to keep you more comfortable. The bronchoscopy tube will be passed through your nose into your throat, and then gradually lowered to explore your windpipes and lungs. The test takes about 30-60 minutes. Most people tolerate it well.

When you go for the procedure, you will be given a fact sheet that discusses it further and lists the unlikely but possible risks associated with the procedure. You will be asked to sign a consent form. You can refuse, of course, to have any procedure at any time.

You will have a chance to talk with the doctor immediately after the procedure and again when the laboratory results are back. Please feel free to ask the doctor any questions you have about the procedure and the results.

## WHAT IF THE DIAGNOSTIC TESTS SHOW THAT I HAVE CHRONIC BERYLLIUM DISEASE?

- Today, Chronic Beryllium Disease is not considered a fatal condition. For a few people, however, it can become serious enough to cause disability. Most people

with the disease are able to control the symptoms with prescription drugs and regular medical treatment so that they can live full and productive lives.

- Some people can be diagnosed with the disease but have no symptoms. If you do not have any symptoms, you probably will not require treatment and Chronic Beryllium Disease will probably have little effect on your life. Even so, you should see a doctor regularly to monitor the disease.
- Treatment with a group of drugs called *corticosteroids* ("steroids"), such as *prednisone*, may be advised for those with symptoms of, or breathing tests that show Chronic Beryllium Disease. (These "steroids" are not the same as the ones you hear about athletes using.) These steroids reduce inflammation and are believed to help keep the condition from progressing. Complete cure is rare, but steroids may be effective in controlling the disease. Any decision to use drugs should be made after discussing possible side effects with your doctor.
- Any person with a lung condition, including Chronic Beryllium Disease, may benefit from pneumonia and flu vaccinations and early treatment of respiratory infections.
- If you smoke cigarettes, try to STOP. This is especially important for those with lung disease. Exposure to beryllium may increase a person's chances of getting lung cancer. It is important to eliminate major additional cancer risks such as smoking.

- If your current job exposes you to beryllium and you do have a beryllium related health condition, the facility doctor will recommend that you move to a job with no beryllium exposure. It is not known if removal will help slow or stop the progression of the disease, but it is probably wise to change to a non-exposed job as a precaution. Your employer will attempt to place you in a non-beryllium exposed job without loss of rate or seniority. You have the right to challenge any medical restriction placed on you.

**This fact sheet was prepared for your use in part from information supplied by the Workplace Health Fund. It is NOT meant as a substitute for consulting with your own doctor! However, because Chronic Beryllium Disease is rare, most family doctors and internists have not had the opportunity to treat individuals with Chronic Beryllium Disease. For this reason, you may also wish to consult a lung specialist that your doctor recommends. If you do not have a personal physician, you can request a list of board certified pulmonary doctors from the local medical society, or look for a pulmonary doctor in the yellow pages.**

**Be sure to check if your medical insurance covers the doctor visits that you schedule, because the Department of Energy will not be responsible for doctor visits scheduled outside of their official program.**