

**Fact Sheet: Indoor Air Contaminants at the
Former Bronx New School (PS 51X) Building**
New York State Department of Health
Final Health Consultation - May 2015

The New York State Department of Health (DOH), in collaboration with the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), completed its review of the indoor air testing results for the former Bronx New School (PS 51X) building at 3200 Jerome Avenue in the Bronx. The DOH focused on the chemical trichloroethene (TCE or trichloroethylene). The DOH compared the levels of TCE in indoor air at the school to levels considered a concern for health. Based on this, the DOH concludes:

- At the time of air testing in 2011, people in the building (students, teachers and staff) were breathing TCE at air levels higher than are typically found indoors.
- The air levels of TCE inside the school posed an increased risk for health effects, which depends on people's age and how much time they spent in the school.
- There is uncertainty in our assessment because it was based on very limited indoor air data.
- Because the school has been moved, there is no known ongoing health risk from TCE for students, teachers, and staff at the new location.
- The DOH will work with members of the school community to address concerns and to discuss options for additional follow-up.

This fact sheet provides a brief overview of the DOH review of chemicals found at the former PS 51X. A full report *Public Health Consultation: Public School 51X* – has the details of the review, findings, and conclusions. Copies are available on-line at: <http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/>. For more information, please contact the DOH Project Manager, Dawn Hettrick at 518-402-7860.

Background

In early 2011, the New York City Department of Education and the New York City School Construction Authority collected indoor air samples at PS 51X as part of an environmental audit for the building. Chemicals were found in the indoor air of the school and the air levels of TCE were higher than those typically found indoors. Additional sampling found that contamination was under the building and was the source of chemicals in the indoor air of the school. School officials closed the Jerome Avenue PS 51X school building at the end of the school year in June, 2011, and moved into a different building for the start of the next school year.

Health Agency Review

In August of 2011, the United Federation of Teachers made a request to ATSDR for a review of indoor air sampling results from the former PS 51X building. The DOH and ATSDR completed this review, which is described in the full report, *Public Health Consultation: Public School 51X*. DOH and ATSDR compared the levels of TCE in the indoor air of the school to TCE air levels typically found in buildings and to levels considered a concern for health. DOH and ATSDR considered that children (students) might be more sensitive than adults (teachers and staff) to the effects of

TCE. The agencies also considered how much time teachers, staff and children spent in the former school building.

The best scientific information does not tell us with certainty whether breathing TCE at levels found in the indoor air at PS 51X caused or will cause health problems. However, we used this scientific information, limited sampling results, and established methods to estimate the following risks:

1. There was some increased risk (characterized in the report as “moderate”) for certain types of birth defects in infants (heart defects) born to teachers or staff who were pregnant while teaching or working at PS 51X. Our estimation of this risk was based on studies of laboratory animals. Whether or not TCE causes heart defects in humans is not known.
2. There is a lower increased risk (characterized in the report as “low”) for certain types of cancer and immune system effects for teachers, staff, and students.

Next Steps

The DOH and ATSDR urge parents, teachers, staff and students with concerns about the potential health effects of breathing TCE while attending the former PS 51X School at 3200 Jerome Avenue to share their concerns with DOH and their health care providers. The DOH and ATSDR also ask the public to read the final *Public Health Consultation: Public School 51X* (see <http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/>). DOH and ATSDR provide in the health consultation up-to-date information on TCE and health. DOH is currently evaluating the feasibility of a follow up health study.

The report is now available for review. Copies of the report are available on-line at: <http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/>.

Contacts for More Information

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