

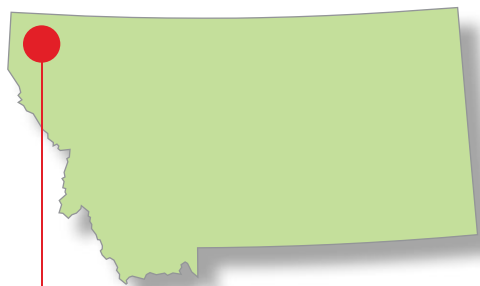
Stop disease clusters.
Protect people.
Control toxic chemicals.

Disease Clusters in Montana

An unusually large number of people sickened by a disease in a certain place and time is known as a 'disease cluster'. Clusters of cancer, birth defects, and other chronic illnesses have sometimes been linked to chemicals or other toxic pollutants in local communities, although these links can be controversial. There is a need for better documentation and investigation of disease clusters to identify and address possible causes. Meanwhile, toxic chemicals should be identified and controlled through reform of the Toxic Substances Control Act, so these chemicals don't pollute communities and sicken people.

Investigations of disease clusters are complex, expensive, and often inconclusive, partly due to limitations in scientific tools for investigating cause-and-effect in small populations. Preventing pollution is the best way to avoid creating additional disease clusters. Strategies for prevention include: (1) Directing and funding federal agencies to swiftly assist state and local officials, and investigate community concerns about potential disease clusters and their causes; (2) Reducing or eliminating toxic releases into air, water, soil and food through stronger environmental controls and tough enforcement of those requirements; and (3) Requiring chemical manufacturers to ensure the safety of their products.

Montana has suffered from at least one confirmed disease cluster. Although the environmental contaminant that caused this cluster is known, experts researching other disease clusters have generally been unable to pinpoint exact causes. Regardless of the cause, disease clusters can devastate communities with anxiety and emotional and financial difficulties including high medical costs and lowered property values, as well as the tremendous burden of the disease itself.



LOCATION:
**LIBBY,
LINCOLN COUNTY**

DISEASE:
**Respiratory diseases
and cancers**

LOCATION: **Libby, Lincoln County**
DISEASE: **Respiratory diseases**

In 2008, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) identified a cluster of malignant cancers and respiratory diseases from 1979 to 1998 in Libby, Montana. From the 1920's to 1990, vermiculite was mined in and near Libby, Montana and contaminated the entire community and surrounding area. The vermiculite was contaminated with tremolite asbestos, a known carcinogen and cause of non-malignant respiratory illness. Since 1999, the EPA has been working with the community to clean up contamination and reduce exposure.



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National Disease Clusters Alliance

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