



Philadelphia Department of Public Health  
**Division of Disease Control**

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***Health Advisory***  
**Eye Irritation Following Cheerleader Event**  
**December 5, 2011**

Today, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health has become aware of multiple cases of eye irritation related to attendance at a cheerleader competition held over the weekend. The total number of people attending the event held at a local High School exceeded 1,000. Approximately 100 persons have presented to Emergency Departments and private medical offices for evaluation, although not all have been symptomatic (some just worried-well).

Affected persons have presented with the main complaint of eye burning and irritation, and occasional adjacent skin burning and irritation. For some cases, the symptoms began while they were present at the cheerleaders' event. For others, the symptoms developed, or were first noticed, four-eight hours later. Physical findings reported from EDs who have been evaluating the cases include red eyes and/or conjunctivitis. Symptoms are improved using gentle lavage of the eyes with saline solution. There are no other symptoms reported in association with this illness, including no fever, nausea, vomiting, respiratory distress, urticaria, or neurological symptoms. The presence of other symptoms should suggest an alternate diagnosis.

A Hazardous Materials response team was sent to the High School where the event occurred. This prompted much media attention and may have prompted many parents and event attendees to seek medical advice. To present, no abnormal findings or possible sources of the irritant substance has been identified at the school.

In all likelihood, this event represents contact irritation of the eyes from a chemical contaminant, possibly a cleaning solution or related compound. Based on current knowledge, the Health Department recommends only symptomatic treatment of affected persons, including gentle lavage of the eyes. There is no need for evaluation or treatment of asymptomatic persons. Nor is there a need to quarantine symptomatic or exposed persons. This should be a self-limited condition.

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