

Manny Munoz ([00:00](#)):

You're listening to iHeartRadio Communities, our weekly public affairs show, I am Manny If you have any thoughts, comments, or questions, please feel free to reach out to me on Instagram. My handle is @iodmanny. That's @iodm-A-N-N-Y. As we approach the 25th anniversary of the September 11th attacks, we're reminded that for many people, the health effects of that day are still unfolding. Thousands of kids, teens, students, residents, and others who were exposed to dust and debris around ground zero might not even realize that the reason they're developing some chronic health, uh, conditions is because of their condition, connection to nine eleven. Let's discuss it as we bring in Dr. Leigh Wilson, Medical Director of NYC Health and Hospitals, World Trade Center Health Program, Clinical Center of Excellence. That is quite a title, Dr. Wilson. Thanks for joining us.

Dr. Leigh Wilson ([00:57](#)):

Thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate you taking the time, uh, to review for your listeners the important topic that this is.

Manny Munoz ([01:05](#)):

Yeah, why, why is this an especially important moment to reach out to people who might have been young kids or teenagers, uh, at the time and now are having problems, don't realize they might be connected to nine eleven?

Dr. Leigh Wilson ([01:20](#)):

This is an important time as we are taking the time at the World Trade Center Health Program to let young survivors, so those that were in the New York City disaster area during the time between 9/11/01 and 7/31/02. So, these folks that were students, potentially young residents, people living in the area, could be a volunteer or somebody attended daycare, but the folks that were 21 and younger on 9/11 we are taking the time now with the anniversary, uh, approaching to remind them that they are potentially eligible for the World Trade Center Health Program.

Manny Munoz ([01:53](#)):

But, and a lot of people probably assumed that if they were, happened to be in the area or something in the days and weeks and months after 9/11 and they felt healthy for years, that they're probably in the clear. That's not necessarily true. Is that what you're saying?

Dr. Leigh Wilson ([02:08](#)):

Yeah. So, our conditions are based on your exposure and a certain qualifying condition. So the government has a list of conditions that based on when symptoms developed, they may cover if you, uh, reach a particular threshold for your exposure. There is a lot of information on the World Trade Center Health Program website. It's on cdc.gov/wtc for World Trade Center to get an idea if you meet the exposure criteria for the program, if you maybe have an eligible condition, and if your symptoms may have started in a time period that might be covered by the program.

Manny Munoz ([02:39](#)):

And we'll get into some of that in a, in a moment, but what, what are, in your experience, some of the most common health conditions that you're seeing now, even so many years later, that are linked to nine eleven related exposures?

Dr. Leigh Wilson (02:54):

So, the conditions that were first recognized in a short period of time post 9/11 were conditions you can imagine being related to direct inhalation of the dust, um, sinus disease, uh, maybe asthma, different breathing conditions, GERD, which is also known as acid reflux. And again, these all have criteria for when the symptoms have onset and the time of diagnosis and how much time somebody has spent in the disaster area. More recently, when this Zadroga Bill went through Congress and was signed into law, uh, on January 2nd, 2011, this program also started covering cancers. There are many cancers that are listed on the website that, um, are covered by the program. And again, they also have certain amount of latency, meaning time of exposure to time of diagnosis and criteria for how much time you spent in the area.

Manny Munoz (03:40):

And that website again is cdc.gov/wtc for World Trade Center. We often hear about the first responders under- understandably. Um, and people might not realize that there are others who might qualify for, you know, no-cost care through this program.

Dr. Leigh Wilson (04:00):

So, absolutely. I think it's very common to, for people to understand the roles that the, the first responders played, the FDNY, the sanitation, the police and so on. I think it's I - much less understood, um, how young people were exposed. So I definitely appreciate you taking the time to talk about that today. So young people may have been exposed at school or in their home residences, maybe they had, um, dust in the air ducts in their apartment where they were living or potentially dust contaminating their carpets if they were a young child crawling on the carpet, um, being exposed that way. I think it's much, uh, more difficult for people to imagine that type of exposure and much easier to, to remember their pictures we saw on the news or the first responders, uh, being exposed to the dust from September 11th.

Manny Munoz (04:42):

You're talking about people who, who spent significant time in the general vicinity, not somebody who might have visited or been there for a couple of days in the weeks and months after the attacks, right?

Dr. Leigh Wilson (04:55):

So, it depends. If they were there in the immediate aftermath, that's obviously considered a time of higher exposure. Um, but, you know, folks that were there in weeks and months later, there's different amounts of criteria for hours that were spent in the area to determine if they qualify to be in the program. And then there's a different amount of exposure that's needed, a higher amount of exposure needed to get a condition certified or covered through the World Trade Center Health Program.

Manny Munoz (05:18):

Couple more minutes here with Dr. Leigh Wilson, Medical Director, NYC Health and Hospitals, World Trade Center Health Program, Clinical Centers of Excellence. What, what are some of the other kinds of, uh, like cancers or chronic illness that, that you've found that can appear years later, even decades after potential exposure?

Dr. Leigh Wilson (05:40):

So, there are some people who are developing something called sarcoidosis, which is, um, it mainly manifests in the lungs, but it's an immune condition, COPD, which is chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, in some cases can be covered by this program, various forms of interstitial lung disease, and in addition, the cancers that we talked about that are now covered.

Manny Munoz (05:59):

What about mental health? Uh, somebody affected, uh, you know, post-traumatic stress or whatever, childhood trauma from what they experienced, what they saw, is that something that i- is treatable through this program?

Dr. Leigh Wilson (06:16):

I'm really glad you brought that up because a lot of people do focus on the physical health, but, um, a lot of folks suffer in silence with mental health conditions. I have people come into this day who have been having nightmares since 9/11, that have had other signs or symptoms of PTSD, depression, anxiety. And once they have their initial visit here, they'll meet with a social worker or other mental health professional who will make a determination, do they potentially have a condition that can be linked back to their 9/11 exposure? So yes, thank you for bringing up the mental health piece.

Manny Munoz (06:45):

Yeah, I am, I imagine, I mean, we know what an important role that played for many of the first responders and those that worked in, in the recovery and the cleanup. I imagine anybody really who lived in the area or who spent some time there in the days and months were affected by, uh, I guess it would be impossible mentally not to be affected by what you witnessed or saw.

Dr. Leigh Wilson (07:07):

Absolutely. Yeah, and as we were talking earlier, there were a lot of people who were young at the time, so that's a differential impact when you're a young person exposed to that and, you know, your parents are stressed as well. There's a lot, a lot that goes into it. There's a lot of unrecognized mental and behavioral health, um, that we certainly cover.

Manny Munoz (07:24):

Without question, uh, the website, cdc.gov/wtc. So let's talk about that exactly. What exactly does the program provide? Is it like screenings? Does it cover treatment?

Dr. Leigh Wilson (07:36):

First responder program and the survivor programs operate a little bit differently. In the survivor program, in order to stay in the program and have annual surveillance, you do need to be deemed to have a WTC certifiable condition, meaning an illness that's linked to 9/11. If you're a first responder, you don't necessarily have to have a qualifying or, uh, or certifiable condition, but you can be annually, uh, checked on and get your screenings done.

Manny Munoz (08:01):

What, what about cost? Uh, how is somebody determined to have a 9/11 related condition? What is the process?

Dr. Leigh Wilson (08:07):

So, the process is determining when somebody's symptoms started, um, what is the actual disease or condition and, how much exposure do they have? So going through all of those things, if it's a cancer, uh, obtaining a pathology report to determine, uh, the latency, meaning time of diagnosis - uh-huh. Uh, after your exposure, and, is it a covered condition? And, I believe you asked about cost. So, uh, in the survivor program, the, uh, members or the patients, we call them members as well, um, they must have private insurance that gets billed first. And again, the care is for only for their certifiable conditions. Mm-hmm. And the government then is the, the second payer. So it, um, it's a little bit different than just saying no cost.

Manny Munoz (08:50):

Sure.

Dr. Leigh Wilson (08:51):

No cost healthcare, because it's specifically for the certified condition. It's not all healthcare that's covered.

Manny Munoz (08:56):

Yeah, and I guess it would be like a covered condition or something like that. What about somebody who, who moved away, uh, years later or something like that? Do they, uh, do, do they qualify? Should they still, uh, consider applying?

Dr. Leigh Wilson (09:09):

Absolutely. There is a national program, um, that is operated. It operates a little bit differently than our clinical centers here in New York City, but all of that information is on the, the cdc.gov website, um, and they, the explanation on how to apply and how to access care should be there as well.

Manny Munoz (09:24):

Are, are people surprised that they have a 9/11 related condition when they're not diagnosed for five, 10, 15, 20 years later?

Dr. Leigh Wilson (09:35):

Yeah, they certainly can be. Um, again, it's, it's really about the government's criteria, the symptom onset, the c - particular disease, and the amount of exposure somebody has. So it, it, once you meet all those criteria, that is what, uh, leads to a certifiable or covered condition.

Manny Munoz (09:49):

What are you still, what are you still learning so many years later about the long-term effects of exposure to the, the ground zero and the surrounding area?

(09:58):

So there's a lot of ongoing research. Um, there's research trying to understand are there cognitive impacts, meaning, you know, are there, um, are there, uh, other mental health, uh, is there cognitive impairment that's potentially related to their exposure or to their PTSD? Right. Um, there's a lot of current research going on trying to understand the long term health effects.

([10:18](#)):

W - again, uh, gi- give us the information where we could go and who should consider, uh, looking into the program.

Dr. Leigh Wilson ([10:23](#)):

So anybody that was in the New York City disaster area between 9/11/01 and 7/31/02, um, the map, uh, the disaster area is on the website. Uh, anybody that was in the area at the time should certainly consider, uh, looking at that and determining if you might be eligible for the program.

Manny Munoz ([10:42](#)):

CDC.gov/wtc is the website, cdc.gov/wtc. Dr. Lee Wilson, medical director, NYC Health and Hospitals, WTC Health Program Clinical Center of Excellence. Dr. Wilson, so appreciative for everything you're doing. Thanks so much for the time and the information. Be well.

Dr. Leigh Wilson ([11:03](#)):

Thank you so much for having me.

Manny Munoz ([11:06](#)):

I am Manny Munoz. I appreciate you listening to iHeartRadio communities this week. As always, if you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, reach out to me on Instagram. My handle is @iodmanny, that's @I-O-D-M-A-N-N-Y, and that'll do it for another edition of iHeartRadios Communities. I'm Manny Munoz. Until next time.