

Parents furious over school cancer cluster scare

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Parents and students say they should have been told about a cancer cluster scare at a high school on Brisbane's north side, instead of hearing about it on radio.

Queensland Health will conduct a preliminary assessment of the cancer rates at the Deception Bay High School, where 11 teachers have contracted cancer in the past few years.

This morning parents and students said they were angry authorities had not told them about the possible cluster.

Student Amy Haldane says she does not want to go to school.

"I've had a few teachers that have been sick and they're not coming back until the next semester and they should've told us," she said.

Parent Sandra Marsden says she is worried for her child.

"If it's a cluster of it, that is a concern and if it can affect the teachers well maybe it can affect the students as well," she said.

Education Queensland is offering ongoing support to staff.

Premier Anna Bligh says there could be more cases of cancer among the staff at the school.

"You'll appreciate people might've worked at this school six years ago and are no longer working," she said.

Tags: [secondary-schools](#), [teachers](#), [cancer](#), [australia](#), [qld](#), [brisbane-4000](#), [deception-bay-4508](#)

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• CPK:

12 Sep 2008 12:55:20pm

so they should be. with so many developing cancer in such a short time frame, would suggest environmental factors

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)



Cancer fears: Deception Bay State High School (Education Queensland: decebayshs.eq.edu.au)

- [Map: Deception Bay 4508](#)
- [Related Story: 11 cancer cases at school: Bligh](#)

- **braddles:**

12 Sep 2008 12:59:20pm

Slow down people. Where I work (in a school), quite a few older staff members have been out due to cancer related issues over the past 24 months. This does not mean the other staff and students are in any danger at all.

Although I feel for the people who have cancer, is this really a story worthy of the ABC website and a headline placement?

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **Brad:**

12 Sep 2008 1:11:06pm

It's understandable since the ABC had its own cancer cluster scare in Brisbane.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **eternityforme:**

12 Sep 2008 1:03:11pm

Qld Dept Ed. How on earth can you keep the public in the dark about something as severe as this, irrespective of whether or not the cause has been indentified or not. When were you going to notify parents?? Shame on you!

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **MO:**

12 Sep 2008 1:23:29pm

Proven clusters are fairly rare I think. Most are investigated and found out not to be.

If this is not a real cluster (after thorough investigation) then one of the causal factors may be a large influx of many people to an area, "concentrating" the cancers in an area.

From memory, this was the finding for the leukaemia scare in Emerald QLD in the early nineties(?).

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **Tim:**

12 Sep 2008 1:30:25pm

11 cases in one school seems suspicious to me. How will they ever prove that the problem lies within the school? Modern medicine still knows precious little about what actually causes cancer. There are hundreds of smoking guns related to this cause. I wonder if there is a mobile phone tower nearby?

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **Gareth Pye:**

12 Sep 2008 1:39:30pm

Yeah, blame a mobile phone tower. One of the least likely causes. 100 m from a mobile phone tower you'll get more radiation from the 20 phones in the class room than the tower.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

■ **Tim:**

12 Sep 2008 1:52:19pm

Electromagnetic radiation is a suspect and it cannot be ruled out. I used to think it was all alarmist nonsense until I saw a group of kids pop popcorn with nothing but the radiation from the mobile phones. Have a look on youtube, and be alarmed!

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

■ **braddles:**

12 Sep 2008 1:41:03pm

as I said before this is not an isolated case. The school I am at has had higher percentage of staff in a shorter timeframe diagnosed with cancer. This is not due to there being a cancer cluster and in fact, no mention of it has ever been raised.

What is the average age/gender of the people affected? where have they worked previously? are they smokers or members of another high risk group? What types of cancer? etc.....

many factors to be cancelled out before the alarm bells need to be sounded.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

● **Sunshine:**

12 Sep 2008 1:43:33pm

Folks, just take a deep breath and wait for the results of the investigation. Getting angry does no one any good - least of all the students and teachers at the school.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

■ **shayne:**

12 Sep 2008 1:58:27pm

I for one, as a parent - would be outraged if there was suspicion (proven or not) of any chance my child was at risk.

The parents should be outraged, to not disclose the concern (probably due to unwanted media attention) is downright selfish.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

■ **Sunshine:**

12 Sep 2008 2:13:32pm

I think you will find it was motivated by a desire to get FACTS rather than alarm people for no apparent reason. Look at the hysteria now ... with nothing people can do about it. Facts. Facts. Facts. Please.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

● **Andrew:**

12 Sep 2008 1:49:30pm

No, so many cancers developing in a short time frame would not suggest an environmental factor. It would suggest someone counting the cancers which are present in a group of middle aged people and finding a number higher than they think should be normal. This is because people incorrectly think it is normal for cancers to be evenly spread across the land - a situation which would be far more staggerly improbable than a few happening in one place. Add this to the fact that some will have occurred before the people got to the school, some will have been incorrectly reported as cancer at all, and they are a whole range of different cancers and it will add up to a random collection of factoids on a slow news day.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **JRM:**

12 Sep 2008 1:57:42pm

If we are going to have 'sacry' stories like these can we at least see relevant statistics. A number on it's own is worthless. 4 people doesn't make a cluster. 4 out of 4 may be of concern. 4 out of 2000 not some much of concern.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **Ed:**

12 Sep 2008 2:02:11pm

If this is a proven cancer cluster, that defies normal demographics to explain, I wonder what sought of causal factor could be at play, and whether the causal factor is similar to whatever caused the cancer cluster in the ABC studios. Something like a toxic building syndrome would seem to be likely candidate. Maybe a synergy of various toxins, like formaldyhyde in chipboard; fungicides in house paint; heavy metals in computers; and outgasing plastics. Eventually this stuff catches up with us, and maybe it's time to start implimenting policies that protect people from toxic building syndrome. It wouldn't hurt, and further, could save lives. Now days, best building practice in Europe is heading towards toxin free building. Why not do it here?

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **Paul:**

12 Sep 2008 2:14:32pm

Cancer clusters are a very rare occurrence, most perceived clusters are on investigation proven to be false. Lets just allow an investigation to assess the risks before over reacting.

In assessing clusters you need to examine a range of factors including the type and sub type of cancers, potential causes of those types of cancers (as not all cancers are the same nor caused by the same factors), the age sex profile of the persons with the cancers, the types of personal exposures (given that smoking alcohol, obesity, genetic predisposition, and sun exposure are the main risk factors for most cancers) the length of exposure to a particular site (many cancers form over many years and may not be a result of exposure at this site) and whether the cancers are confirmed or not (as there are benign tumours in many circumstances not cancer).

If after you assess these issues and compare the cancer distribution with the background risk of the population, through the Qld cancer registry, there is still an excess risk then you can go hunting for possible carcinogenic exposures.

Let the public health experts assess the issue, confirm the cancers before going off calling it a cluster. Cancer rarely just happens its a long term chronic condition that develops over years.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **lilworried:**

12 Sep 2008 2:16:16pm

As a graduating student of last year at this school it scares me to think that the education department had kept this a secret from its students. In my current workplace (education queensland) I feel as though the same issues could be happening around me as they were in high school with me none the wiser. Not a good feeling to wake up to. I would like to wish all of the eleven staff suffering from cancer related issues all of the best.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)