



## **Hazelwood Health Study Fact Sheet 2**

### **The Hazelwood mine fire was associated with increased stress and concern in children in the Latrobe Valley**

The Hazelwood Schools Study was established to explore the psychological impacts of the Hazelwood mine fire on school age children. Children in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in all Morwell schools, and in the majority of schools across the wider Latrobe Valley, were invited to participate. Preliminary findings suggest a possible association between Hazelwood mine fire smoke exposure and an increase in stress and concern in children in the Latrobe Valley.

The findings draw on information from questionnaires and interviews completed by children from 20 schools both in Morwell and across the Latrobe Valley. Further information collected from parents, teachers and education departments is still being examined.

We interviewed 69 children and they told us how the smoke affected their health and wellbeing at the time of the event. Some children spoke about how they had breathing difficulties, were frustrated and worried, and did not sleep very well during the event. Some children were also worried about the health of other family members. They also said that finding out information about what was happening, distracting themselves and thinking in a positive way helped them to cope better.

The questionnaire assessed the longer term psychological impact of the mine fire event on the children. Questions included:

- how often the children still think about the event;
- how often they avoid reminders of the event; and
- how often are they more alert or watchful to warning signs of a similar event occurring.

On average, the 323 children in the study scored at a moderate level on these questions. Children generally answered the questions by saying that they 'rarely to sometimes' think about, avoid or are more alert or watchful about the event. The findings showed that young children (Year 3 and 5) scored significantly higher than older children (Year 7 and 9). Children from Morwell schools also showed higher scores than those from schools outside of Morwell; however, this was mostly explained by a greater number of younger children being recruited in Morwell.

The findings suggest that, whilst many children were stressed by the mine fire event at the time, most are not experiencing ongoing anxiety. However, parents who are concerned that their children might be experiencing ongoing stress or trauma should contact their General Practitioner for further assessment or support. Guidelines about how to identify stress or trauma in children are attached to this Fact Sheet.

The findings are considered preliminary while the researchers further collate information from parents, teachers and education departments. Further results will be released as they come available.