

## Cairns Base Hospital waits for results on air quality tests after chemicals found in baby ward

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Damon Guppy | April 18th, 2013

Fifteen infants have been relocated from the Special Care Nursery to a vacant section of the intensive care unit after test results revealed levels of formaldehyde gas above the accepted exposure standards were present.

A health and safety hygienist will conduct testing throughout block C as hospital officials investigate the source of the formaldehyde gas, which may have been emitted by materials used in the ongoing redevelopment.

"There were some complaints from staff about minor irritations to their eyes so we did some testing to check whether there were raised levels," Tropical Public Health Services director Dr Richard Gair said.

"We don't know at this time what the source is.

"Formaldehyde is widely distributed in the environment.

"There are many sources like furnishing, joinery and so on, so we're looking to see what the source might be at the moment."

The air was tested for 34 different types of volatile organic compounds before formaldehyde was confirmed as the contaminant.

Dr Gair said the short-term health risks to the babies was very low and the families of all babies in the recently revamped unit had been contacted about the matter.

"It's an irritant; it can cause irritation to the skin, irritation to the eyes, irritation to the breathing," he said.

"Once you're removed from the source of formaldehyde those symptoms rapidly diminish."

Dr Gair said the chemical posed cancer risks only if people were exposed over a prolonged period to formaldehyde, which is present in some disinfectants and cleaning products and building and furniture materials.

The nursery will be closed until officials are certain the chemical is at a very low level.

More test results are expected back tomorrow or Monday.



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