

# Deaths linked to common spore

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — A cancer treatment center failed to adequately monitor infections at its transplant unit and to report 10 unexpected deaths now traced to fungus spores that entered through an old ventilation system, state officials said.

In a 148-page report issued Tuesday, the state Health Department said the deaths at the Roswell Park Memorial Institute in Buffalo were caused by aspergillus spores that entered a new bone marrow transplant unit through the air-filtering system.

Ten of 25 transplant patients died after contracting **aspergillosis** infections in the year before the institute's new transplant unit was closed in April 1983.

The patients either died from the infections, which brought on symptoms similar to pneumonia, or the infections contributed to their deaths, said Frances Tarlton, a spokeswoman for the health department.

An investigation concluded that "the air-handling system serving the transplant unit was not adequate to filter out aspergillus spores," state Health Commissioner David Axelrod said.

"Although the evidence is inconclusive, construction work near the institute may have been responsible for

an increase in the numbers of spores encountered by the ventilation system," he said.

During the year, several construction projects were under way at the institute, and work on Buffalo's new rapid transit system was going on nearby, state officials said.

The aspergillus fungus, which is harmless to healthy humans, is commonly found in earth, and its spores are often released by construction work, Ms. Tarlton said. Bone marrow transplant patients' lowered immunity for fighting off infections is often even further reduced because of drugs taken to prevent rejection of the transplant, Ms. Tarlton said.

Although the institute closed its transplant unit in April 1983 to install a new air-filtration system, Ms. Tarlton said Roswell officials never informed the Health Department of the deaths.

The state learned of the deaths and began its investigation after reports were broadcast in October by Buffalo radio station WBEN, she said.

Peter Slocum, a spokesman for Axelrod, said the commissioner was not contemplating firing any Roswell Park officials.