Researchers at the California Department of Public Health released their study on cancer among AFA members in their state - Nov. 2000.

How did they study cancer among flight attendants?

First, the researchers searched the California (CA) cancer registry for the names of CA-based AFA members who were diagnosed with cancer between 1988-95. For a comparison group, they chose people in the general population in CA (who were similar to the AFA members in terms of age and gender) and counted how many of *them* were diagnosed with cancer during that same time period.

What were the results?

The proportion of flight attendants diagnosed with all types of cancers combined was no different than the proportion of people in the general population. However, the rate of breast cancer among the *women* flight attendants was approximately 30% higher than among people in the general population, and the rate of malignant melanoma among flight attendants was approximately two times higher. The rate of Kaposi's sarcoma among male flight attendants was also disproportionately high, but because this cancer is associated with viral infection, job-related hazards can be ruled out. The full report is available upon request.

Why was the study limited to CA-based AFA members?

The study was paid for by the California Breast Cancer Research Program and the funding was only enough to compare the cancer rates in CA. Even so, this is the largest study of cancer among flight attendants to date.

Why do flight attendants have a higher risk of being diagnosed with these cancers?

The fact that a disproportionate number of these two particular cancers were diagnosed among the flight attendants *suggests* that the risk factor(s) *could* be job-related. Although the reason for these increased rates is not fully understood, the researchers did offer some possible explanations. For example, both breast cancer and malignant melanoma have been associated with radiation exposure. Breast cancer and malignant melanoma have also both been associated with the disruption of circadian rhythms Finally, both cancers are associated with higher socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status can be an indicator of "lifestyle factors" like sun exposure and diet.

Do the results apply to other flight attendants?

On average, AFA members in CA are slightly older than other AFA members. Also, they are more likely to fly international routes, which may be important because radiation exposures are typically higher, and circadian rhythms more disrupted, than on domestic trips.

What can I do to protect myself?

Whether these cancers are associated with hazards on or off the job, the facts should not be ignored. We hope these results will prompt researchers to investigate more closely. In addition, we recommend that you contact the American Cancer Society (ACS) and ask for their free publications on early detection methods for these cancers. The ACS recommends that all women over the age of 39 have a clinical breast exam every year, and that women between the ages of 20 and 39, have an exam every three years. In addition, they recommend that all women 20 and older examine their own breasts for lumps or changes every month. Also, the ACS describes the steps that you can take to protect yourself against malignant melanoma, and the parts of your body that deserve extra attention. Melanoma is rare and if detected early, it is almost 100% curable. If not, it can be fatal. For detailed, free information on these and other cancers, call 1-800-ACS-2345 or go online at www.cancer.org.