

**IMDM INNER – Esher – 6<sup>th</sup> of August 2019**

**Title: OPM exposure     Ill health: Rash and impaired breathing**

**Incident**

A team from the Inner Off-Track were responding to a service request at Esher where a family had reported suffering from health issues relating to an oak tree which was infested with Oak Processionary Moth (OPM). The oak tree was found to contain approximately 40 nests.

The team attended the site and climbed the oak tree with the use of harnesses and ropes, in order to bag, seal, and lower the OPM nests for later incineration.

At the end of the shift, the Team leader removed his Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) which included; coveralls, face mask (with air filters), gloves and climbing helmets (additionally, the sleeves and ankles of the coveralls were taped up to prevent any contamination from the OPM).

During the process of removing this PPE, it is believed that hairs from the OPM came off of the coveralls and into contact with the Team Leaders skin. The Team Leader was wearing a short sleeve shirt under his coveralls and this may have played a part in the exposure.

The Team Leader later noticed a rash on his arms and during that evening had impaired breathing. This may have been exacerbated by the Team Leaders asthma. The Team Leader, having visited their GP, had a few days off work following the exposure.



The OPM caterpillars gathering on the trunk of an Oak.

**Items for discussion**

If an oak tree is identified as containing an OPM nest, it **must be reported** to the WICC and the caterpillars kept away from. This is due to the following complication that could be experienced after the contact:

- **Inhalation:** The hairs are known to cause bronchial / throat irritations and breathing difficulties in some people. Hence symptoms may include coughing, wheezing, chest tightness and/or runny/stuffy nose and possible allergic reactions in some people similar to hayfever.
- **Skin:** The fine hairs can cause a skin irritation, sometimes severe on some people causing lesions.
- **Eyes:** The dust and fine hairs can cause irritation to the eyes in some people.
- **Ingestion:** Unlikely route of exposure however may occur during tree surgery operations.