

# State asked to probe cancers at Southside

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The Chemung County Health Department will ask its state counterpart to investigate seemingly high rates of cancer among students at Southside High School.

The county Health Department is gathering data about the cases and will give the information to state health officials, said Thomas Kump, the county department's director of environmental health. Kump hopes the state will begin investigating within the next two months.

County officials began collecting information this week after learning that 13 Southside High School students have contracted cancer since 1997. Six of the school's current 1,100 students have cancer.

State Department of Health officials plan to attend a public informational meeting at 7 p.m. May 2 at Southside High School to discuss the issue.

News of the cancer cases has some Southside High students afraid to drink the school's water. But Kump said the water, supplied by the Elmira Water Board, is safe and is tested regularly for contaminants.

The school's water does not come from on-site wells, but from a municipal water system.

"The water provided to Southside is the same water provided to the 60,000 to 70,000 other Chemung County residents," he said.

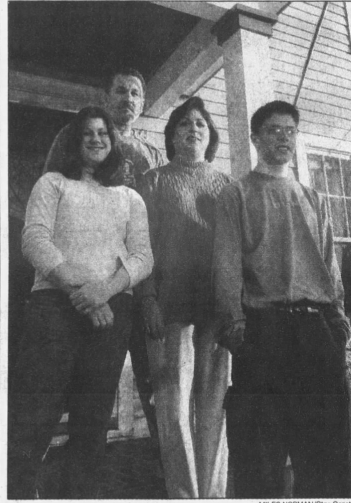
Kump said county health officials are alarmed about the reported incidence of cancer, but need more information to decide whether the numbers are unusually high and caused by something in the environment.

That's why Kump is trying to collect as much information as possible about the individuals with cancer. Kump is asking students with cancer, or their parents, to contact the county Health Department.

State health officials can't say whether or when they will conduct an investigation because the case is new and they have little information, spokeswoman Kris Smith said Thursday.

"We get a myriad of calls of this nature," Smith said. "We respond to all of them. But in order to prioritize it we need to review the facts to determine if it's an unusual type of cancer, the same types of cancer, the same types of cancer, the same types of cancer."

See CANCER/10A



MILES NORMAN/Star-Gazette

Michael Tobin, right, a sophomore at Southside High School, is battling cancer. With him is his sister, Maria, and his parents, Tim and Margaret Tobin.

## Southern Tier cancer rates

The New York State Department of Health tracks cancer incidence rates. This chart shows cancer rates in Chemung, Schuyler and Steuben counties from 1993 to 1997 for males and females, and how they compare to the state.

County	Number of cases 1993-97		Incidence rate per 100,000 people	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Chemung	1,321	1,260	506.1	360.4
Schuyler	230	209	418.5	398.7
Steuben	1,295	1,144	441.1	327.6
<b>NY state</b>	<b>210,494</b>	<b>213,795</b>	<b>463</b>	<b>345</b>

SOURCE: New York State Department of Health. ERIC BANN'S/Star-Gazette

## Learn more

For more information about cancer rates in New York state and specific types of cancer in area counties, visit the state Department of Health's Web site at: [www.health.state.ny.us/nycd/cancer/97/volume1.htm](http://www.health.state.ny.us/nycd/cancer/97/volume1.htm).

## How you can help

The Chemung County Health Department is collecting information on the number of cancer cases among residents of the Southside, especially those who live near or who attend Southside High School.

If you or someone you know meets the above criteria, please contact the county Health Department at 607/737-2019. All names and other information will be kept confidential.

## Rumors take hold at Southside

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the "cancer water."

The rumors and myth-making phenomenon on Saturday at the school's drinking fountain Thursday, and his friends yelled for him to stop.

They said it was radioactive or something," said Rios, 15. Others said the school was built on a toxic dump and said they would not drink



RIOS

Six of those are current students at the school.

The letter signed by three sets of concerned parents and two city councilmen asked the school district to answer questions and disclose information about all environmental tests on the soil, water and air at the school property at 777 S. Main St.

That information needs to be dispersed and discussed to quiet the rumors, said high school senior Diana Winnefeld.

See SOUTHSIDE/10A

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