

The collapse of the World Trade Center (WTC) on September 11, 2001, created a massive dust cloud filled with harmful toxins, such as crystalline silica and asbestos. Many rescue, recovery, and cleanup workers and nearby residents were exposed to this dust. A study by the WTC Health Registry showed exposure to the WTC dust is linked to various **systemic autoimmune diseases**.

## What Are Systemic Autoimmune Diseases?

Systemic autoimmune diseases are conditions where the immune system mistakenly attacks its own tissues. Common systemic autoimmune diseases include:

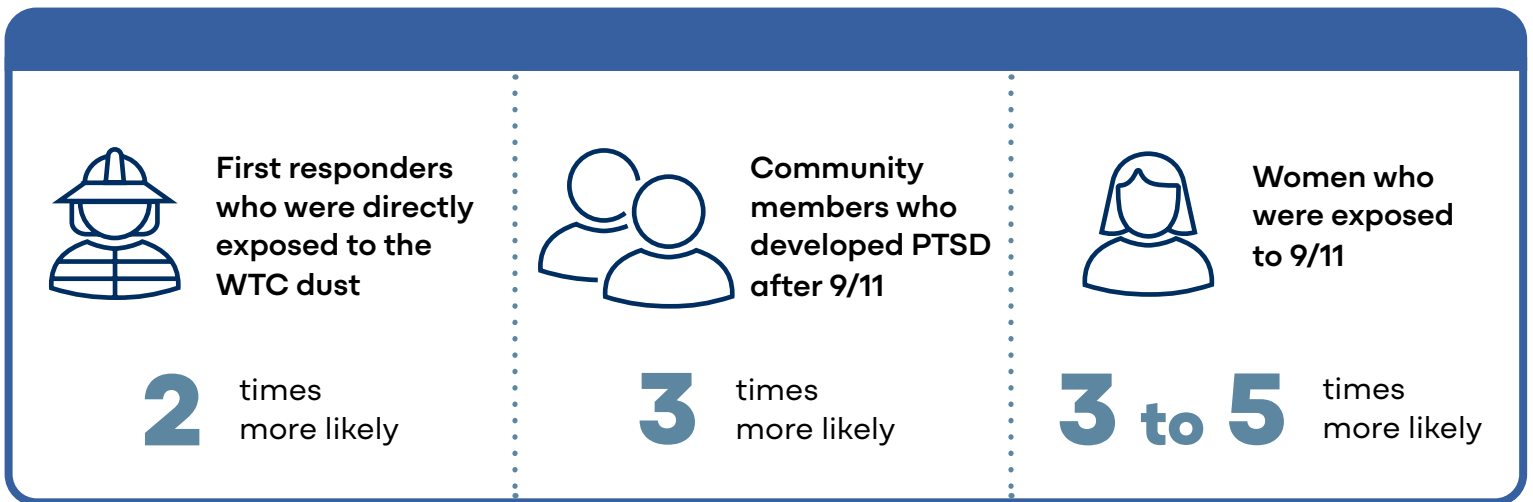


- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Lupus
- Sjögren’s syndrome
- Scleroderma
- Polymyositis (muscle inflammation)

Common symptoms of systemic autoimmune diseases include chronic fatigue, joint pain, swelling, and trouble doing everyday activities.

## What Did We Learn?

A study of more than 1,000 Registry enrollees found that those who experienced intense exposure to the WTC dust\* or developed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and women are at higher risk for systemic autoimmune diseases:



The results of this study are similar to two NYC Fire Department studies of firefighters, which also showed WTC rescue and recovery work is linked to increased systemic autoimmune diseases.<sup>†</sup>

\*Defined as being in the WTC dust cloud and reporting at least one of the following: inability to see more than a few feet, trouble walking, trouble finding shelter, being covered in dust, or loss of hearing.

## Why Does This Matter?

Understanding the link between exposure to the WTC dust and the increased likelihood of developing systemic autoimmune diseases helps us make sure that 9/11 survivors get the medical care they need. Early detection, monitoring, and access to specialized programs can greatly improve quality of life for survivors who are experiencing long-term health effects from 9/11.

## What Should I Do?

If you worked at or near or lived near the WTC site on 9/11, it is important to:



- 1. Be aware of symptoms** such as chronic fatigue, joint pain, swelling, or trouble doing everyday activities.



- 2. Get regular medical checkups.** Let your health care provider know about your 9/11 exposure and if you have any of these symptoms. Ask your provider about screening for systemic autoimmune diseases.



- 3. Access the health resources you need.** Programs such as the WTC Health Program offer support and monitoring for 9/11 survivors and responders.



To learn about other 9/11-related physical and mental health conditions, visit [nyc.gov/911health/conditions](https://nyc.gov/911health/conditions).



Contact 988 for free, confidential crisis counseling, mental health and substance use support, and referrals to care. Call or text 988 or chat at [nyc.gov/988](https://nyc.gov/988). Text and chat services are available in English and Spanish, and counselors are available by phone 24/7 in more than 200 languages.



For questions about the WTC Health Registry, email [wchr@health.nyc.gov](mailto:wchr@health.nyc.gov).