

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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“Johnson and Johnson Facing Devastating Lawsuits”

J&J, based in New Brunswick, New Jersey, faces talc-related lawsuits by 6,610 plaintiffs nationally, largely based on claims of developing ovarian cancer by using its products for feminine hygiene. J&J, which had \$76.5 billion in sales in 2017. In February of 2016, a jury found J&J talcum powder contributed to a 62-yr old woman’s ovarian cancer and awarded her \$72 million for compensatory damages. Another \$62 million in punitive damages was awarded to her family members, as she died last fall. Then, in May of 2016, another woman was awarded \$55 million in damages after talc imbedded in her ovaries was found to have contributed to her cancer. Still, manufacturers of talc-containing products, such as J&J and its Baby Powder and Shower to Shower products, have refused to acknowledge the link between talc and ovarian cancer and have failed to adequately warn consumers of the risks. In five trials in Missouri involving ovarian cancer lawsuits, juries found J&J liable four times and awarded the plaintiffs a total of \$307 million. In California, a jury awarded a now-deceased woman \$417 million. But in October, a Missouri appellate court threw out the first verdict there for \$72 million and a California judge tossed the \$417 million verdict. J&J is seeking to reverse the other verdicts. Asbestos claims are a more recent challenge for J&J. It won the only other asbestos-related trial in November when a Los Angeles Superior Court jury ruled in its favor. J&J suffered its first trial loss in a lawsuit claiming its talc-based products including Johnson's Baby Powder contain cancer-causing asbestos, with a New Jersey jury ordering J&J and another company to pay \$37 million in damages. The lawsuit was brought by a New Jersey resident, who said he developed mesothelioma after inhaling dust that was generated through his regular use of J&J talc powder products since his birth in 1972. Mesothelioma is a deadly form of cancer associated with exposure to asbestos. It affects the delicate tissue that lines body cavities, most often around the lungs, but also in the abdomen and elsewhere. J&J denied the allegations and says Johnson's Baby Powder does not contain asbestos or cause cancer. In April 2018, a \$117 million verdict was awarded against J&J and a supplier in favor of a man who said his asbestos-related cancer was caused by long-term use of J&J's Baby Powder and it could open a new front for thousands of cases claiming the widely-used product caused cancer. Plaintiffs lawyers claim that internal J&J documents show baby powder had been contaminated with asbestos. A “lawsuit tsunami” is coming.

In the America that I love, simply use safer cornstarch-based products instead of talcum powder.

Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

Surgeon/Scientist/Patient Advocate

27439 Highway 441, Kentwood, LA 70444

985-229-6955 Home | 985-229-3760 – Fax | 985-514-0578 – Cell

rhowesmd@hughes.net | www.iwillfindthecure.org

