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Just making sure

Katherine Laitsch waits patiently as Ketna Mistry clips a wisp of hair for testing. Katherine and 30 of her schoolmates at AU's Child Development Center (CDC) are playing in Leonard Hall while the CDC playground undergoes further analysis and soil removal due to elevated levels of arsenic found there in recent weeks. Although arsenic would have to be ingested in order to pose any health risk, the children were tested through the D.C. Department of Health and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry to determine possible exposure. Results from the tests are not yet available.

The Army Corps of Engineers, responsible for the arsenic investigation and clean-up on campus, is currently organizing more detailed soil tests on the south side of campus to determine whether further soil removal will be necessary. The arsenic is a by-product of chemical weapons tested at AU during World War I and has been identified at higher levels as a carcinogen. The university is also making tests available to children who attended the center in the last year and to other campus populations who could possibly be exposed to soil containing arsenic: groundskeepers, construction and maintenance workers, and athletic teams, for example. Currently, AU's health plans will cover testing for any AU employee under the standard co-pay system. An information line has been set up to answer questions from the campus community, at 885-2020. The D.C. Department of Health can be reached at 535-1755. A university Web site with updated information is pending.

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