

**Cluster of Legionella pneumophila Pneumonia (Legionnaire's Disease)  
Associated with an area of Ashworth Avenue in Hampton, New Hampshire**

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**August 25, 2018**

**What is the situation in Hampton with Legionella?**

The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services' Division of Public Health Services (DPHS) has identified four persons with Legionella pneumonia, also known as Legionnaire's disease, a potentially serious bacterial pneumonia. These individuals likely acquired Legionella at the end of July or early August in the area of Ashworth Avenue between Island Path and H Street in Hampton, New Hampshire. DPHS is investigating possible additional cases. DPHS is also actively investigating the source of these infections, which is usually from inhaling aerosol droplets of water contaminated with the bacteria. Sources of the aerosol can include showers, hot tubs, faucets, cooling towers, misters, and decorative fountains. It is not spread by drinking contaminated water.

**Who do I call with questions about this situation?**

If you have information or questions about this situation, please call the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services. A public inquiry phone line is available to answer questions from 8am -4pm, including over the weekend, by calling 603-271-9461, or for those calling from within the state of New Hampshire, toll-free at 1-800-852-3345 ext 9461.

**What is Legionnaires' disease (Legionella pneumonia or sometimes Legionellosis)?**

Legionnaires' disease (Legionellosis) is a bacterial disease that may cause pneumonia. Between 12 and 63 cases are reported each year in New Hampshire with an average of 32. Most cases occur as single isolated events. Outbreaks are rare.

### **Why is it called Legionnaires' disease?**

An outbreak of this disease in Philadelphia in 1976, largely among people attending a state convention of the American Legion, led to the name "Legionnaires' disease." Subsequently, the bacterium causing the illness was named *Legionella pneumophila* and the name of the illness was changed to Legionellosis.

### **How severe is the illness?**

Legionnaires' disease can be a mild respiratory illness or it can be severe enough to cause death. From 10 to 40 percent of healthy adults have antibodies showing previous exposure to the organism, but only a small percentage has a history of previous pneumonia.

### **Where are Legionella bacteria found?**

*Legionella* bacteria exist naturally in water and moist soil. They have been found in creeks and ponds, hot and cold water taps, hot water tanks, water in air conditioning cooling towers and evaporative condensers, and soil at excavation sites.

### **How is Legionnaires' disease spread?**

The disease appears to be spread through the air from a soil or water source. All studies to date have shown that person-to-person spread does NOT occur. You also CANNOT get it from drinking water or swimming in the ocean.

### **Who gets Legionnaires' disease?**

Most healthy individuals do not become infected with *Legionella* bacteria after exposure. People at higher risk of getting sick are those 50 years of age or older, current or former smokers, those with a chronic lung disease (like COPD or emphysema), those with a weak immune system from diseases like AIDS, cancer, diabetes, or kidney failure, and people who take drugs that suppress (weaken) the immune system (like after an organ transplant or chemotherapy).

### **What are the usual symptoms of Legionnaires' disease?**

The early symptoms of Legionnaires' disease may be flu-like with muscle aches, headache, tiredness and dry cough followed by high fever, chills and occasionally diarrhea. Symptoms of pneumonia may include rapid breathing or difficulty breathing and chest pain.

### **How soon do symptoms occur/appear?**

The incubation period for Legionnaires' disease ranges from two to 10 days, but is usually five to six days.

### **How can I get tested?**

If you are not ill, you do not need to be tested for this infection. If you symptoms consistent with pneumonia (lung infection), then you should be seen by a healthcare provider who may perform testing. Your healthcare provider may perform a chest x-ray. They may also test your urine or do a laboratory test that involves taking a sample of sputum (phlegm) or washing from the lung. The test results for these laboratory tests can take a few days to a week or more to get the results back.

### **I don't have insurance but have been sick and need to get tested?**

A healthcare provider must see you to evaluate your symptoms and decide if testing is appropriate. Unfortunately there is no way for us to provide you with this evaluation.

### **What is the treatment?**

Legionnaires' disease requires treatment with antibiotics (medicines that kill bacteria in the body), and most cases of this illness can be treated successfully. Healthy people usually get better after being sick with Legionnaires' disease, but they often need care in the hospital.

### **I think I have (or had) Legionnaire's Disease. What do I do?**

If you have questions about your health, please contact your healthcare provider. If you have information or questions about this cluster, please call 603-271-9461.

### **I have been diagnosed with Legionella, is my family at risk?**

No, your family is not at risk of coming down with Legionella from you.

### **I visited Hampton, NH. What do I do?**

If your visit was longer than 14 days ago, you are beyond the usual time it takes to develop disease. If your visit was within 14 days, your risk of disease is very low, but if you become ill, present your travel history and concerns to your primary care clinician and s/he can test,

treat and report, if appropriate. If your visit was within 14 days, and you are not ill, there is no evidence that you should be tested or take antibiotics.

### **I live in Hampton, NH. What do I do?**

Although risk is low, DPHS recommends that people who are increased risk for severe disease from Legionella may choose to avoid the area of Ashworth Avenue between Island Path and H Street in Hampton, New Hampshire. People who are at increased risk include those who are older than 50, who have chronic respiratory disease, or who have a weakened immune system.

### **I have a trip planned to Hampton, NH. Should I cancel?**

While the investigation is underway, in an abundance of caution, DPHS recommends that people who are increased risk for severe disease from Legionella may choose to avoid the area of Ashworth Avenue between Island Path and H Street in Hampton, New Hampshire. People who are at increased risk include those who are older than 50, who have chronic respiratory disease, or who have a weakened immune system.

### **Should I wear a mask in town?**

No. We have no evidence that will help prevent disease.

### **Can I catch Legionnaire's from other people?**

No. It is not contagious from person to person.

### **What is DPHS doing to fix this?**

NH DPHS is actively investigating additional suspect cases and is working closely with the Town of Hampton and the Department of Environmental Services to identify and mitigate the possible environmental source.

### **Should I stay indoors?**

We have no evidence whether the Legionella bacteria are in an outdoor or indoor water source. The DPHS is actively investigating where the Legionella bacteria are coming from, but we do not know yet.

### **Can I get Legionnaire's Disease from swimming in the ocean?**

No. Legionnaire's disease is usually acquired by inhaling aerosol droplets of water contaminated with the bacteria. Sources of the aerosol can include showers, hot tubs, faucets, cooling towers, misters, and decorative fountains. It is not spread by drinking or swimming in contaminated water.

### **Should I drink bottled water?**

No. Legionnaire's disease is usually acquired by inhaling aerosol droplets of water contaminated with the bacteria. Sources of the aerosol can include showers, hot tubs, faucets, cooling towers, misters, and decorative fountains. It is not spread by drinking contaminated water.

### **Should the DPHS or town cancel events or close hotels in town?**

The DPHS is actively investigating where the Legionella bacteria are coming from, but we do not know yet. If we identify the source, we will do whatever it takes to prevent additional transmission.