



THE CITY OF NEW YORK

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

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Information about Legionnaires' Disease for Residents of the Parkchester Area of the Bronx, 2007

What is Legionnaires' disease?

Legionnaires' disease (or legionellosis) is a type of pneumonia caused by a bacterium (germ) called *Legionella*. *Legionella* is found in the environment and grows in warm water. People can get sick from inhaling contaminated mists from cooling towers, showers, faucets, and whirlpool spas. The disease occurs most commonly in the summer and fall. In 2006, 185 cases were reported among New York City residents (a rate of 2.3 per 100,000 people).

Is Legionnaire's disease contagious?

Legionnaires' disease is not contagious. People sick with Legionnaires' disease cannot spread it to other people. Groups at high risk include people who are middle-aged or older, especially those who are cigarette smokers, people with chronic lung disease or weakened immune systems, and people receiving immunosuppressive drugs.

Has Legionnaire's disease increased in the Parkchester area of the Bronx?

Yes. In the fall of 2006, a citywide increase in Legionnaire's Disease was noted, but the highest increase was in the Parkchester area, where rates of Legionnaire's disease were four times the citywide rate. No additional cases were diagnosed between October 2006 and April 2007, when four new cases from this community were reported.

What are the symptoms of Legionnaires' Disease?

Symptoms of Legionnaire's disease can include fever, chills, and cough. Other symptoms are muscle aches, headaches, tiredness, loss of appetite, confusion and occasionally diarrhea. Legionnaire's disease can mimic other types of pneumonia, so it may go unrecognized at first.

What should I do if I am concerned that I have Legionnaires' disease?

If you have symptoms such as fever, chills and cough, you should go to your medical provider to be evaluated for pneumonia. If you have an underlying medical condition like emphysema, or if you are a smoker, your doctor should consider testing for Legionnaires' disease.

How serious is Legionnaires' disease, and what is the treatment?

Legionnaire's Disease can be very serious and causes death in about 15% of cases. However, there is an easy test for the disease, and if appropriate antibiotics are started early, most patients can be treated successfully. Healthy people usually recover from the infection.

How can *Legionella* bacteria be controlled in building water systems?

The most important way to prevent the disease is to maintain cooling towers and plumbing systems to limit the growth and spread of *Legionella* bacteria. Visual inspection and regular maintenance of building water systems and cooling towers is highly recommended.

What is the Health Department doing to investigate this increase?

The Health Department is interviewing all patients and sampling water systems to identify common sources of infection, if possible. Legionnaires' outbreaks follow a seasonal pattern and often end without clear explanation.

The Health Department staff will work through community boards and local groups to inform residents and answer questions. Medical providers have been advised of the cluster and are urged to consider the diagnosis in people with symptoms. Confirmed cases must be reported immediately to help identify the source, or sources, of this increase.