

PRESS RELEASE

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END DATE: July 30, 2016

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RE: Legionnaires' disease in Genesee County

During this warm weather season, the Genesee County Health Department (GCHD) would like to remind residents of the risk of Legionnaires' disease. Legionnaires' disease is a respiratory infection characterized by the bacteria *Legionella* and can present as either Legionnaire's disease or as a milder illness called Pontiac fever. Legionnaires' symptoms include fever, cough, shortness of breath, muscle aches, clinical pneumonia, and sometimes diarrhea and abdominal pain. Pontiac fever has similar symptoms but does not progress to pneumonia. Antibiotics are highly effective against *Legionella* bacteria. During 2016, there have been no reported cases of Legionnaires' disease in Genesee County.

Legionella bacteria are commonly found in the environment (rivers, lakes, streams). It is a waterborne disease, usually located in man-made water supplies that aerosolize water, such as showers, hot water tanks, humidifiers, cooling towers, whirlpool spas, and decorative fountains. People get Legionnaires' disease when they breathe in a mist or vapor containing the bacteria. Aspiration is the most common way that bacteria enter the lungs. The bacteria are not spread from one person to another person. **One cannot become ill from drinking water containing *Legionella*.** Water does not need to be filtered to remove *legionella*. People who are at most risk of developing Legionnaires' disease are those who are older, smokers/former smokers, immunosuppressed, or who have other underlying or chronic health conditions. For those who are at an increased risk, GCHD suggests the use of bottled water for drinking, cooking, and brushing of teeth.

Proper maintenance and disinfection of hot water tanks, humidifiers, cooling towers, whirlpool spas, and decorative fountains are the most effective measures in preventing outbreaks.

GCHD has worked closely with the local medical centers to provide information about *Legionella* and clinical guidance about Legionnaires' disease infections. A Legionnaires' disease frequently asked questions fact sheet is posted on the GCHD website at www.gchd.us. GCHD continues to conduct surveillance for Legionnaires' disease cases.