

MEDIA RELEASE

DATE: July 6, 2017

END DATE: September 30, 2017

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RE: Legionnaires' Disease in Genesee County

“The Genesee County Health Department (GCHD) would like to remind residents of the risk of Legionnaires' disease as it is most common during the summer and early fall months,” stated Director and Health Officer, Mark Valacak. 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 ache, headache, 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.

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 cooling towers, hot water tanks, humidifiers, nebulizers, showers, hot tubs, and decorative fountains. People get Legionnaires' disease when they breathe in a mist or vapor containing the bacteria. The bacteria are not spread from one person to another person. One cannot become ill from swallowing water containing *Legionella* bacteria. However, people may be exposed to *Legionella* bacteria from water that “goes down the wrong pipe” (aspiration). Filtering water does not remove *Legionella* bacteria. People who have an increased risk of developing Legionnaires' disease are those who are older (age \geq 50 years), smokers/former smokers, immunocompromised, or who have other

underlying 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. Individuals uncertain of their risk status should consult their healthcare provider.

Proper maintenance and disinfection of hot water tanks, humidifiers, nebulizers, cooling towers, whirlpool spas, and decorative fountains are the most effective measures in preventing outbreaks. Cleaning, disinfecting, and maintenance should be done following manufacturer recommendation.

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

Your Health. Our Work.

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