

MEDIA RELEASE

DATE: September 13, 2018 **END DATE:** September 30, 2018

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RE: **Increase in Legionnaires' Disease Cases in Genesee County**

The Genesee County Health Department (GCHD) reports an increased incidence of Legionnaires' Disease and would like to remind residents of the risk during the warm weather season. While Legionnaires' can occur at any time of year, more illness is reported in summer and early fall. Legionnaires' disease is a respiratory infection characterized by the bacteria *Legionella*. Symptoms resemble other types of pneumonia and can include cough, shortness of breath, fever, muscle aches, headaches, and sometimes diarrhea and mental changes. Antibiotics are highly effective against *Legionella* bacteria. To date in 2018, there have been 20 cases reported in Genesee County.

Legionella bacteria are found naturally in the environment (rivers, lakes, streams), but can also be found in man-made water supplies that aerosolize water, such as cooling towers, hot water tanks, humidifiers, nebulizers, showers, hot tubs, and decorative fountains. Filtering water does not remove *Legionella* bacteria.

People can contract Legionnaires' disease when they accidentally swallow water into the lungs or breathe in a mist containing the bacteria. The bacteria are not spread from one person to another person. Most healthy people exposed to *Legionella* do not become infected. Individuals at higher risk of developing Legionnaires' disease include those ages 50 and above, current or former smokers, and people with chronic lung disease or weakened immune systems from other underlying illnesses or medications.

Individuals with any concerns about Legionnaires' disease should consult their healthcare provider.

Legionella growth can occur in buildings or structures that have complex water systems, such as long-term care facilities, hospitals, hotels, and cruise ships, that are not managed adequately and where disinfectant levels are low, water is stagnant, or water temperatures are ideal for growth of *Legionella*. Proper maintenance and disinfection of the water systems in which *Legionella* grow, including hot tubs, hot water tanks, humidifiers, nebulizers, cooling towers, and decorative fountains, are the most effective measures in preventing Legionnaires' disease. Cleaning, disinfecting, and maintenance should be done following manufacturer recommendations.

The Genesee County Health Department encourages high risk facilities to adopt water management plans to help prevent Legionnaires' disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a toolkit that can help building managers develop a water management plan that can be accessed online at: <https://www.cdc.gov/legionella/downloads/toolkit.pdf>

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