

MEDIA RELEASE

DATE: December 10, 2018 **END DATE:** December 21, 2018

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RE: **Update: Legionnaires' Disease in Genesee County**

As the weather has gotten colder, reports of Legionnaires' disease (LD) in Genesee County have slowed down. In 2018 the Genesee County Health Department (GCHD), in consultation with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has conducted public notification, provider education, and onsite investigations relative to this year's increase in Legionnaires' disease cases. To date in 2018, there have been 25 cases of LD reported in Genesee County. Case residences have been throughout Genesee County and on multiple water sources. Increased rates of Legionnaires' disease are consistent across the State of Michigan and continue to occur even in various healthcare settings.

While illness is often reported during the warmer summer and early fall, GCHD wants to remind our community that *Legionella* bacteria growth can occur year-round inside buildings or structures that have complex water systems. Complex water systems include 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.

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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. 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.

Smoking increases the chances of developing LD for individuals who are exposed to the bacteria. Avoiding smoking is the single most important thing that you can do to lower your risk of contracting Legionnaires' disease. While there are no vaccines that can help protect you from LD, there are vaccines that can prevent other types of pneumonia (pneumococcal and flu vaccines). All adults 65 years or older and adults younger than 65 with certain health conditions or who smoke are recommended pneumococcal vaccination. Everyone 6 months or older should get an annual flu vaccine.

If you or a family member develop symptoms of pneumonia after being a patient, visitor or staff member of a healthcare facility, we encourage you to speak with your healthcare provider about specific testing for Legionnaires' disease. Clinicians are encouraged to test patients with suspected healthcare-associated pneumonia for LD, and report LD diagnoses to GCHD immediately.

Further information regarding Legionnaires' disease is available from the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/legionella

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