

## MEDIA RELEASE

**DATE:** May 14, 2019 **END DATE:** May 31, 2019

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**RE:** **Legionnaires' Disease in Genesee County – Spring 2019 Update**

Ahead of the summer, the Genesee County Health Department (GCHD) reminds residents of the risk of Legionnaires' disease (LD). The GCHD continues to investigate LD cases and provides this update to ensure that residents, healthcare providers, and building managers are aware of the risk of *Legionella* bacteria and how to prevent or protect against the spread of LD. To date in 2019 (through May 13<sup>th</sup>) there have been 8 confirmed cases of Legionnaires' disease reported in Genesee County, compared to 7 cases during the same time period last year. Case residences have been throughout Genesee County and on multiple water sources. Increased rates of LD are consistent across the State of Michigan and continue to occur even in various healthcare settings.

LD is more common during the summer and early fall because of the ideal environment that warmer temperatures create. But *Legionella* bacteria growth can occur year-round, especially inside buildings or structures that have complex water systems such as in long-term care facilities, hospitals, hotels, and cruise ships. If a water system is not managed adequately, *Legionella* will grow where disinfectant levels are low, water is stagnant, or water temperatures are ideal. 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 LD. Cleaning, disinfecting and maintenance should occur following manufacturer recommendations.

People can contract LD when they breathe in a mist or accidentally swallow water containing *Legionella* into the lungs. The bacteria are not spread from person to person. Symptoms typically appear two to 14 days after exposure to *Legionella* bacteria. Most healthy people do not get LD after being exposed to *Legionella*. Individuals at higher risk of

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developing LD 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. The disease requires treatment with antibiotics and most cases can be treated successfully.

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 LD. 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 develop symptoms of pneumonia we encourage you to see and speak with your healthcare provider and ask about specific testing for Legionnaires' disease. Be sure to tell your provider about your working conditions, if you have been around any possible sources like fountains or hot tubs, and if you have traveled, visited a hotel, healthcare facility or tall building within the past two weeks. This information will help to correctly diagnose and treat the disease, locate a possible source of the bacteria, and prevent others from being exposed to it. GCHD will continue to monitor cases and provide updates to the public.

Further information regarding LD is available from the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov/legionella](http://www.cdc.gov/legionella) and on the Genesee County Health Department website at [www.gchd.us](http://www.gchd.us).

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