

NC Health And Human Services Investigating Legionnaires Outbreak

By Administrator

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FLETCHER — The Buncombe and Henderson County Health Departments, in conjunction with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, are investigating multiple cases of Legionnaires' disease reported in individuals who attended the NC Mountain State Fair in Fletcher, NC, Sept. 6–15, 2019. “We don't yet know whether people might have been exposed to Legionella bacteria at the NC Mountain State Fair,” said State Epidemiologist Dr. Zack Moore. “As a precaution, we are recommending that anyone who went to the fair and has symptoms of pneumonia, like cough, fever or shortness of breath, see a doctor right away and talk with them about Legionnaires' disease.”

Legionnaires' disease is a form of bacterial pneumonia (lung infection). A person may develop Legionnaires' disease when they breathe in mist or accidentally swallow water into the lungs that contains Legionella bacteria. In North Carolina, more than 150 cases of Legionnaires' disease are reported each year. Symptoms typically begin two to 10 days after exposure and can include cough, shortness of breath, fever, muscle aches and headaches. Legionnaires' disease is a serious illness but can be treated effectively with antibiotics. Legionella bacteria can also cause a milder flu-like illness called Pontiac fever, which resolves without treatment.

Most healthy people exposed to Legionella bacteria do not get sick. The people at highest risk for Legionnaires' disease include individuals 50 years or older, current or former smokers, and those who have a chronic lung disease or a weakened immune system.

Legionella bacteria are found naturally in the environment. These bacteria can become a health concern when they grow and spread in human-made water systems like hot water tanks, cooling towers of air conditioning systems, decorative fountains and hot tubs or spas that are not properly maintained.

People who attended the NC Mountain State Fair and are experiencing cough, fever or shortness of breath should call their health care provider right away.

For additional information or to report possible cases of Legionnaires' disease, please call the Division of Public Health at (919) 733-3419 or contact your local health department. In Buncombe County, call (828) 250-5109. In Henderson County, call (828) 694-6019.