

Public Health Officials Confirm Legionnaires Case Outside Of Mountain State Fair

By Donna Martinez

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Public health officials are reporting a case of Legionnaires' disease in a person who did not attend the Mountain State Fair but was present at the Western North Carolina Agricultural Center (WNC Ag Center) after the fair ended. This person attended the Quilt Show held at the WNC Ag Center Sept. 27–29.

To date, this is the only case of Legionnaires' disease in an individual who did not attend the NC Mountain State Fair but was at the WNC Ag Center after the fair ended on Sept. 15. To protect the individual's privacy, specific information such as county of residence or age will not be released.

Legionnaires' disease is a form of pneumonia caused by infection with the Legionella bacteria. People can get Legionnaires' disease when they breathe in aerosolized water (small droplets of water in the air) that contain the bacteria. Symptoms usually begin two to 10 days after being exposed to the bacteria. "We don't know how or where this person might have been exposed to the Legionella bacteria," said Dr. Zack Moore, State Epidemiologist. "It is possible that they were exposed at the WNC Ag Center, but Legionella bacteria are very common in the environment so we can't rule out exposure in another location."

Preliminary findings from the public health outbreak investigation suggest that exposure to Legionella during the Mountain State Fair occurred in the Davis Event Center, particularly during the last five days of the fair. Additional analysis of information collected during the investigation is ongoing.

Public health officials are continuing to monitor for new cases of Legionnaires' disease and have not identified any other reports in people who were at the WNC Ag Center after the Mountain State Fair ended.

Symptoms of Legionnaires' disease include fever, cough and shortness of breath. These symptoms can be very similar to the flu or other respiratory infections that are common at this time of year. It is important to talk to your doctor if you have these symptoms to determine whether testing or treatment for any of these infections might be needed.

Health officials visited the WNC Ag Center on Sept. 25 and 27 and did not identify any significant sources of aerosolized water. The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and

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Consumer Services (NCDACS) suspended the rental of the Davis Event Center at the WNC Ag Center for mitigation activities after Legionella bacteria were found in one of six samples. Out of an abundance of caution, NCDACS recommended and supervised an extensive industrial cleaning of the WNC Ag Center water system. Legionella was not found in follow-up testing of samples collected on Oct. 4 and 7.

More information about Legionnaires' disease can be found on the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/legionella/index.html and on the DPH website at epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/diseases/legionellosis.html.