

Tuesday, 26 April 2022

Legionella alert St George Hospital cooling tower

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District is advising people who may have been in the vicinity of St George Hospital Kogarah in the past two weeks to be on the lookout for symptoms of Legionnaires' disease, following identification of Legionella bacteria in a cooling tower in the area.

The contaminated tower was identified through routine monthly sampling. There has been one recent case of Legionnaires' disease in the area, a man in his eighties. The Public Health Unit is investigating whether the man's illness may be linked to the contaminated tower.

Symptoms of Legionnaires' disease can develop up to 10 days from the time of exposure to contaminated water particles in the air and include fever, chills, a cough and shortness of breath and may lead to severe chest infections such as pneumonia.

People who develop this disease are diagnosed by chest X-ray and a urine test and usually require antibiotic treatment in hospital. Those most at risk are people with underlying lung or other serious health conditions and people who smoke.

The contaminated tower was immediately cleaned, and all St George Hospital cooling towers are being re-sampled to ensure there is no ongoing risk in the area. Other local operators of cooling towers should ensure their monthly sampling and cleaning is undertaken, and report any potential concerns to Georges River Council immediately.

Public health units in local health districts across NSW follow up every case of Legionnaires' disease and work closely with local councils in the management of cooling towers. Routine testing of cooling towers helps identify contamination early and allows for prompt cleaning and corrective actions.

In 2018 NSW Health strengthened the Public Health Regulation to reduce the community's risk of Legionnaires' disease, requiring building owners to conduct risk assessments and monthly tests on cooling towers and notify high levels of Legionella and other bacteria to local councils.

Legionnaires' disease cannot be spread from person to person.

Outbreaks of the disease are most frequently linked to contaminated water cooling systems of air conditioning plants in large buildings.

For more information about water cooling systems management contact your local public health unit on 1300 066 055 or

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/legionellacontrol/Pages/default.aspx>

For more information on Legionnaires' disease:

https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/legionnaires_disease.aspx