

LEGIONELLA ALERT FOR DOCTORS

Please distribute this information to all clinical staff



Health

1. Cooling towers at two locations in the Kogarah business area have been notified this week with positive tests for *Legionella pneumophila*. An environmental health investigation is underway
2. To date, NO associated cases of Legionnaires' disease have been notified
3. Have a high index of suspicion for cases presenting with respiratory symptoms or signs suggestive of pneumonia
4. If you SUSPECT a case, ring the Public Health Unit immediately on 9382 8333

Summary

Cooling towers at St George Hospital and at an office building in the Kogarah business area have shown high counts of *Legionella pneumophila* on routine monthly samples collected on 21 November. Once results were notified to the building owners, the cooling towers were immediately cleaned and decontaminated. The Public Health Unit is working with Georges River Council and building owners to inspect other cooling towers in the Kogarah business area. NO associated cases have been notified to date. However, we are concerned that if cases do occur they are diagnosed and treated appropriately and NOTIFIED promptly to the Public Health Unit.

Modes of transmission

- *Legionella pneumophila* bacteria can contaminate air conditioning cooling towers, whirlpool spas, and other bodies of water. It is spread from the mist and droplets given off by these water bodies, not the air conditioning itself. People walking outside or driving past may be exposed.
- Legionnaires' disease is not spread from person to person.
- Typical incubation period is 2 to 10 days, but more commonly 5 to 6 days.

Symptoms of Legionnaires' disease

Legionnaires' disease usually causes fever, chills, a cough and shortness of breath. Cases may also have muscle aches, headache, tiredness, loss of appetite and diarrhoea. Cases may be very sick with pneumonia. Most people recover but the disease is occasionally fatal, particularly when it occurs in the context of other co-morbidities or immune suppression.

Diagnosis

It is difficult to distinguish Legionnaires' disease from other types of pneumonia by symptoms alone. Chest X-rays help diagnose pneumonia but the diagnosis of Legionnaires' disease requires special tests. **Patients with no or only minor symptoms (eg runny nose without fever) should not be tested for legionella infection.**

- Testing: request sputum culture for legionella, and a urinary legionella antigen test
- Contact the Public Health Unit if you need advice regarding diagnosis.

Treatment

Cases should generally be managed in hospital. Consult [Therapeutic Guidelines: Antibiotics](#) or your local hospital infectious diseases specialist for treatment options.

Public Health Response

URGENTLY NOTIFY the Public Health Unit of any suspected case on **9382 8333**.

Further Information:

- NSW Legionnaires' Disease website: <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/legionnaires/Pages/default.aspx>

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Ferson'.

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