Genesee County Health Department

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Re: Legionnaires Disease Increase in Genesee County

The Genesee County Health Department has been monitoring a significant increase in the number of Legionnaires cases observed in Genesee County during 2014 and 2015. During calendar year 2014, there were 41 cases of Legionella. To date in 2015, we have observed 45 cases of Legionella. Legionella bacteria are commonly found in the environment, usually in water. The bacteria grow best in warm water like the water found in hot tubs, cooling towers, hot water tanks, pools, decorative fountains and large plumbing systems Legionnaires Disease is a respiratory condition caused by when individuals breathe in a mist or vapor (small droplets of water in the air) containing the bacteria. One example might be from breathing in droplets sprayed from a hot tub or pool that has not been properly cleaned and disinfected. The bacteria are **not** spread from one person to another person. The bacteria do not cause illness by drinking the infected water. Individuals who are most at risk of developing Legionnaires Disease are those who have other underlying or chronic health conditions.

Legionnaires Disease is often observed seasonally, with more cases observed between May and October when the weather is warmer. Symptoms of Legionnaires Disease include cough, shortness of breath, high fever, muscle aches, headaches and gastrointestinal issues. These symptoms usually occur 2 to 14 days after being exposed to the bacteria. Legionnaires Disease is diagnosed through primary care evaluation and laboratory testing and is treated with antibiotics. Like other respiratory illnesses, individuals with other health issues are at greater risk of complications.

The Genesee County Health Department has been working closely with the infection control staff members of our local medical centers. They have communicated Legionella information with their staff members. GCHD has had concerns regarding hospital environments and has worked to ensure that appropriate actions have been taken to address those concerns. Clinical guidance was shared with local physicians. An extensive questionnaire has been used by GCHD staff to identify potential common sources of exposure in those who were ill. GCHD posted a Legionnaires Disease fact sheet to our website during the warm weather months to educate the community about this respiratory condition. GCHD has also collaborated with our colleagues at Michigan Department of Health and Human Service (MDHHS) Epidemiology section regarded this observed increase in cases. These Legionnaires Disease cases are being observed throughout Genesee County. There is no specific geographic pattern identified among the cases. There has not been a single source of exposure identified in common among the cases. The majority of individuals diagnosed with Legionnaires Disease have had other chronic or underlying health conditions and are those most at risk for complications of Legionnaires Disease.

We are now seeing the expected seasonal decline in Legionnaires Disease cases. We remain vigilant with our surveillance efforts and are reaching out to the Environmental Protection Agency for their expertise in reviewing our data. A formal report has been submitted to the Centers for Disease Control through our MDHHS colleagues. GCHD continues to seek out Legionella expertise to address this observed increase in disease. The Genesee County Health Department continues to work to prevent the presence of Legionnaires Disease in our community.

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