

Three new cases reported in Hopkins Legionnaires' outbreak

Three new cases of Legionnaires' disease have been identified by state health officials, bringing the total number of cases in the so-called Hopkins outbreak to 12. All the cases have appeared in people who live or work in Hopkins, but the source of the infections remains a mystery.

Investigators believe the three new cases originated around the same time as the previous nine infections. Because the incubation period for the bacteria that causes Legionnaires' can last up to ten days, it can take some time before symptoms develop, meaning that more cases are possible.

Of the three new cases, two have been hospitalized, according to Doug Schultz, a spokesman for the Minnesota Department of Health. While most of those sickened have been over the age of 50, the new patients range in age from their 20s to their 80s.

All cases in the outbreak so far involve people who work or live within a two-mile radius in central Hopkins, Schultz said.

Water samples from several local businesses have been taken and investigators are awaiting test results. Many of the businesses have also taken steps to disinfect potential sources.

This is the largest cluster of cases to hit Minnesota since 1995, when an outbreak in Mankato and Luverne killed two and sickened dozens.

Isolated cases of Legionnaires' in Minnesota are not uncommon, with 50 to 60 cases appearing each year. But so far in 2016, the number of cases in the state has exceeded the average, echoing a similar increase nationwide.

Legionnaires' is contracted by inhaling mist from infected water sources, such as cooling towers, cooling misters, decorative fountains or plumbing systems. It is not spread person to person or by drinking water.

Infection is most likely in people with compromised immune systems or chronic medical conditions. Many who get infected do not show symptoms.

Symptoms of Legionnaires' disease include muscle aches, chills, shortness of breath, headache, fatigue, loss of appetite and coughing. These symptoms may be followed by high fever, pneumonia, abdominal pain and diarrhea.