

Lacey motel guests warned after possible 4th case of Legionnaires' disease

Three confirmed cases of Legionnaires' disease and one suspected case have been detected in guests who stayed at a Super 8 in Lacey, Thurston County. Health officials continue to investigate the outbreak.

With a possible fourth case of Legionnaires' disease linked to a Lacey motel, health officials in Thurston County are warning recent guests and staff to watch for signs of the potentially deadly lung infection.

Meanwhile, officials have signed onto a federal alert system, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Epi-X program, to notify health officials nationwide to report any similar cases.

In the past few weeks, there have been three confirmed cases of Legionnaires' disease and one suspected case among guests at the Super 8 motel at 112 College St. S.E., health officials said.

The motel operators agreed voluntarily to close last week on the advice of Dr. Rachel Wood, the Thurston County health officer. Experts are investigating whether the motel is the source of the infections, which were reported separately over the past two months.

The Lacey motel was renovated in 2013, according to its website. The Super 8 is an independent franchise of the Wyndham Hotel Group.

Thurston County officials have reached out to perhaps dozens of people who stayed at the motel in the six weeks before the motel closed and to staff.

"We have contacted known guests to alert them to the investigation and ask them to monitor their health for 10 days after their last potential exposure," said Nicky Upson, a spokeswoman for Thurston County Health & Social Services. "If they become ill, they have been asked to contact their health-care provider."

Health officials also posted information to the CDC's Epi-X system, which provides real-time alerts to colleagues across the nation. No one had responded as of Tuesday, Upson said.

Local health officials are in contact with experts at the state and the CDC, she added.

Investigators have gathered environmental samples from the motel to see whether there's evidence of Legionella bacteria, which cause the disease, a potentially serious type of pneumonia.

The bacteria are found naturally in the environment, usually in warm water. Infection typically occurs when people breathe in the mist or vapor of water contaminated with the germs. The disease is not spread from

person to person.

Hotel air-conditioning units, whirlpools, hot tubs and ice machines have been linked to the spread of the disease, which sends an estimated 8,000 to 18,000 people a year to hospitals, according to the CDC.

Legionnaires' disease was first identified after an outbreak in 1976 sickened many attendees at an American Legion meeting in Philadelphia.

Health officials investigating 2 cases of Legionnaires' disease that 'appear' linked to Lacey motel



The Super 8 motel near Martin Way in Lacey.

OLYMPIA — Thurston County health officials said Friday they are investigating two cases of Legionnaires' disease that appear to have a connection to a motel in Lacey.

“Two people who recently stayed at the Super 8 Motel on Martin Way in Lacey have contracted Legionnaires' disease, which is a serious form of pneumonia caused by the *Legionella* bacteria that is found naturally in the environment, usually in water,” the Thurston County Health Department said in a news release.

Dr. Rachel Wood, a health officer with the department, said the two individuals recently diagnosed with Legionnaires' disease “appear to have a connection” with that motel.

Health officials have begun an investigation that involves getting environmental samples to try to determine the source of the bacteria.

Hotel whirlpools, showers and air conditioning units have previously been shown to be sources of Legionnaires' disease outbreaks, Wood said.

“People get Legionnaires' disease when they breathe in the mist or vapor of water that has been contaminated with the bacteria. The bacteria are not spread from one person to another person,” the department said.

Wood recommends that guests who stayed at the motel within the past two weeks monitor their own health for the symptoms listed below, and if they become ill, contact their health care provider.

Symptoms of Legionnaires' disease include:

- Fever, tiredness, body aches and headache
- Cough
- Chest pain
- Occasionally diarrhea

Symptoms of the illness appear between two and 10 days after exposure to the bacteria, and most often appear five to six days after exposure, the department said.

Persons at increased risk for Legionnaires' disease include those over 50 years of age and those with certain medical conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), diabetes, and those with lowered immune systems.

Further information on the disease can be found at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov/legionella.