

Sixth case of Legionnaires' disease in Melbourne's CBD confirmed

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An additional case of Legionnaires' disease has been uncovered by health authorities as they work to disinfect cooling towers in nearly 100 buildings in Melbourne's CBD.

The latest case involved a person who visited the eastern end of the CBD in late March, a Victorian Department of Health and Human Services spokesman said. They were hospitalised, but are now recovering.

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Legionnaires' disease explained

Expert in Environmental Microbiology Dr Harriet Whiley explains the symptoms and causes of legionnaires' disease

This [adds to a group of five people](#) - three men and two women, aged from 51 to 71 years - who were recently hospitalised after contracting the pneumonia-like condition. One of them had required life support in an intensive care unit.

All five have been discharged for hospital and are recovering.



Legionella pneumophila bacteria.

A separate group of four people were investigated for having links to the CBD outbreak, but were found to have not been affected, while another two cases are still being investigated.

Victoria's Deputy Chief Health Officer, Dr Finn Romanes, said the Health Department began investigating links to CBD cooling towers after interviews with those affected on Tuesday night and Wednesday morning.

They all reported working in or visiting the eastern end of the CBD in the days before they became ill. They started feeling sick within the last week of March and the first week of April, Dr Romanes said.

The infection is acquired by breathing in fine droplets of water which contain the bacteria, such as spray drifts which are vented off from a contaminated cooling tower.

Authorities have sampled and disinfected three workplaces linked to the

people infected. They identified the further 89 potentially linked water systems by tracing the movements of all five who fell ill.

Authorities said 92 cooling systems in buildings between Spring and Elizabeth streets would be disinfected by the end of Thursday.

"It's safe and appropriate to come to the central business district for work and leisure," Dr Romanes said. "We are taking this as a precaution to minimise any risk that might be present.

"My message to people who have visited the CBD between late March and earlier this month and who may be suffering from pneumonia or flu-like symptoms is to visit their GP who will assess the need for testing for Legionnaires' disease."

Leading plumbers in Victoria said they had been warning authorities about a heightened risk of legionella and biohazards in high-rise buildings in Melbourne for at least 18-months.

Plumber and gas fitter Ian Pewtress said he raised concerns with VicHealth's specialist legionella unit in late 2015, but was told it was a Victorian Building Authority (VBA) issue.

Mr Pewtress said a legionella working group was mooted by the building authority in September, but nothing had happened since.

Dr Romanes said Victoria had a "rigorous regime" for managing the risk of the legionella in water systems.

"We've got one of the toughest regimes in the world, recently picked up by New York," he said. "We have a maintenance system and we have an inspectorate and audits and compliance checks."