

Three legionnaires' cases prompt health authorities to urge businesses to check cooling towers



THREE new legionnaires' cases in Adelaide's south has prompted health authorities to urge businesses to check their airconditioning and industrial cooling towers.

The public health warning comes after two men and one woman — aged between 58 and 77 — were diagnosed with the potentially deadly disease.

All three people were admitted to hospital but the source of the bacteria remains unknown.

SA Health director of health protection Dr Chris Lease said cooling towers

can grow and disperse legionella bacteria if they are not properly maintained.

“Cooling towers are an ideal breeding ground for legionella bacteria that can cause serious respiratory illnesses such as legionellosis,” he said.

“Legionellosis can be particularly harmful to the elderly, smokers and those with compromised immune systems.”

Dr Lease said once a “cluster of cases becomes evident”, the health department works with local councils to identify areas of risk.



Businesses are being urged to check their airconditioning and industrial cooling towers.

He said the latest cases were a reminder to cooling tower operators to undertake regular maintenance.

“While there is no source identified for the recent cases which may or may not be related, the investigation into the cases is continuing and precautionary work to address the identified areas of risk is already underway,” Dr Lease

said.

“Action has already been taken by local councils, building managers and cooling tower operators to reduce the likelihood of any ongoing to risk to public health.”

The new diagnoses follow nine cases in January, suspected to be contracted within the Adelaide CBD.

The first symptoms of legionnaires' disease are non-specific flu-like symptoms including fever, headache and muscle aches.

There may also include a mild cough and some people may develop diarrhoea, vomiting and abdominal pain.

The illness usually progresses rapidly until symptoms of a severe chest infection (pneumonia) become obvious, with high fever, shortness of breath and chest pain being typical symptoms.

Treatment is generally with antibiotics.