

Fatal case of Legionnaires' disease at Parker Towers

Two cases of Legionnaires' disease at the Parker Towers complex in Forest Hills were reported by the city Health Department within two months' time. One was fatal.

Both cases occurred at 104-60 Queens Blvd., where "One person recovered, and one elderly person with health conditions died," the department said in an emailed statement.

Although the cases of Legionnaires aren't classified as an outbreak by the Health Department, officials still advise safety for residents in the complex and surrounding area.

Anyone over the age of 50, or who suffers from chronic lung disease or who has compromised immune systems is advised by the department to exercise caution and seek medical attention if feeling ill.

"As part of the protocol to assess potential sources of Legionnaires' disease, the Health Department is working with the building management to test the building's hot water plumbing system," the agency said.

Legionnaires disease acts like pneumonia and spreads through water vapor such as that from boiling water, mist and evaporation, according to the Health Department website. It's also known for causing flu like symptoms that can be fatal.

The agency's statement also said there is a low risk to tenants at Parker Towers because the buildings do not have a cooling tower. Minimizing the amount of water vapor created while using the building's water reduces the

risk of catching the disease.

“While the risk of infection to tenants is very low, as part of our protocol, the Department will notify residents about the investigation and next steps,” the agency said.

One advocacy group, however, said the city is not doing enough to prevent cases of Legionnaires' disease.

“This latest investigation into the water system at the Parker Towers apartment complex in Forest Hills, Queens is yet another example that the City's narrowly focused and misguided regulations are failing to prevent New Yorkers from contracting Legionnaires' disease (LD),” the Alliance to Prevent Legionnaires' Disease said in a prepared statement. “This is the fourth instance since August 1, 2017, where residents in apartment buildings in Flushing, Rego Park, Lindenwood and now Forest Hills have been advised by the City's Health Department to take precautions when using water in their homes. The rate of new LD cases is unacceptable and additional lines of prevention must be considered.”

The group said there have been 302 cases so far this year, twice as many as there were up until this point last year. The year before, there had been 300 cases in the same time period.

“There is no more important issue than ensuring the safety of our water supply. It is time to stop kicking the can down the road and pursue real solutions so people, particularly those with compromised immune systems, can stop needlessly worrying if the water coming out of their showers and faucets contains a potentially deadly bacteria,” the alliance said. “Let's start working together to develop policies, including consideration of a minimum chlorine residual level throughout the water distribution system, and encourage investments that will provide clean, safe water to our

buildings and homes.”