

Legionnaires' disease outbreak reported in North Port neighborhood

[John Rogers](#)

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NORTH PORT, Fla. (WFLA) - The Sarasota County Health Department is investigating an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease at the Islandwalk at the West Villages community in North Port.

The Department of Health advised community officials to shut down the pool and spa on Friday, Feb. 23.

Residents say at least 11 people were taken to area hospitals for treatment. The Department of Health confirmed they were sickened by a Legionnaires' Disease outbreak. They will do further tests this week.

"The really important thing is identifying the source, making sure we're educating people on the symptoms and then eliminating that source," said Disease Intervention Services Program Manager Michael Drennon.

According to the Mayo Clinic, Legionnaires' disease is a severe form of pneumonia. It is not contagious. Instead, it is spread by inhaling airborne water droplets that have the Legionella bacteria.

The symptoms include muscle pain, chills, high fever, shortness of breath and nausea. It can also lead to a number of life-threatening complications such as respiratory failure, septic shock and kidney failure.

If not treated, Legionnaires' disease can be fatal.

Officials say most outbreaks have occurred in large buildings, perhaps because complex systems allow the bacteria to grow and spread more easily.

Residents in North Port are worried.

"I'm a little concerned. I have my 8-month-old granddaughter coming tomorrow and we were excited to go into the pool. Now, no matter what happens, I will absolutely not let her get into the pool," said resident Candee Rice.

This week, health officials will conduct more tests to make sure the disease has not spread.

"We're going to test the irrigation system, anything else that we think could be a potential source," said Environmental Health Director Tom Higginbotham.

"We believe that we have eliminated that source. Other than that, I don't believe the residents should be concerned," said Drennon.

Officials will do further testing this week and they expect the results to come back within 10 days. They will use specialized treatments to ensure the bacteria is killed.

"It makes me nervous, it makes me worried, it just makes me sure of the fact that I always say I'll never go into the community spa," said Rice.

News Channel 8's John Rogers will have more tonight at 5:30.

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