

# Hamilton Township confirms more deadly cases of Legionnaires' disease

[trentonian.com/news/hamilton-township-confirms-more-deadly-cases-of-legionnaires-disease/article\\_9de4654a-ff96-11ea-a66a-d749a8d05d3b.html](https://www.trentonian.com/news/hamilton-township-confirms-more-deadly-cases-of-legionnaires-disease/article_9de4654a-ff96-11ea-a66a-d749a8d05d3b.html)

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HAMILTON — Legionnaires' disease remains a deadly issue in Hamilton Township amid the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency.

State and local officials are currently investigating a cluster of Legionnaires' disease cases that sickened four Hamilton residents between Aug. 18 and Aug. 24, killing two, township officials announced Friday.

“Due to HIPAA and the right to privacy, specific information on each case cannot be disclosed,” Mayor Jeff Martin’s chief of staff Bianca Jerez reported via press release.

While the township remains tight-lipped on the current outbreak, it’s well known Alvin E. Gershen Apartments off Klockner Road has previously developed a strong association with Legionnaires' disease.

Gershen Apartments had numerous building code violations in 2018, the same year when the complex gained its infamous association with Legionnaires' disease, a severe form of pneumonia caused by legionella bacteria, *The Trentonian* previously reported.

Several tenants contracted the disease over the last two years, and 89-year-old Gershen Apartments resident Agnes DiNatale died from legionella pneumonia on July 11, 2018, the newspaper documented.

In December 2018, a New Jersey Department of Health spokesperson said via email: "NJ DOH is aware of one confirmed case of Legionnaires' disease associated with Alvin E. Gershen Apartments; it is unknown if the apartments were the cause of illnesses. However, NJ DOH is aware of additional cases of Legionnaires' disease associated with this building more than ten years ago. Out of an abundance of caution, NJ DOH and the Hamilton Health Department initiated an investigation to determine if the building is a possible source of exposure. The Alvin E. Gershen owners have been compliant with all public health recommendations and continues to cooperate with the departments of health."

In August 2019, a DOH spokesperson via email said: "There has been a total of three cases of Legionnaires in the last 13 months in residents of this building," referring to Gershen Apartments, the low-income elderly and special needs housing complex also known as Pond Run II. "It is not known whether these residents contracted the illness at this building. It is the Department of Health's standard protocol to initiate an investigation following the identification of two or more confirmed cases of Legionnaires' disease associated with the same building within 12 months of each other."

Legionnaires' disease is caused by airborne legionella bacteria that thrive in warm water environments such as hot tubs, cooling towers, hot water tanks and extensive plumbing systems. The disease is generally not spread from person to person, but Legionella exposure occurs whenever someone breathes in misty airborne droplets of water contaminated with the nasty bacteria.

Hamilton Township disclosed few details about the latest Legionnaires' disease outbreak but suggested the situation may be isolated to the Mercerville area. The Gershen Apartments are located at 1655 Klockner Road near Whitehorse-Mercerville Road.

"While it is often difficult to determine the origin of the bacteria that infected the Hamilton residents," the Martin administration reported in Friday's news release, "the investigation is ongoing and the Division of Health is attempting to identify potential sources of exposure."

The township has collected environmental samples from "selected sites" in Hamilton Township in the Mercerville section, according to the Martin administration.

Furthermore, the township's Division of Health, the state's Department of Health and the state Department of Environmental Protection "are working to identify additional sites to sample."

The freshman mayor is fully aware of the prior association between Alvin E. Gershen Apartments and Legionnaires' disease.

“Upon learning of the positive cases, and given Hamilton’s history with Legionnaires’ disease,” Martin said Friday in a press statement, “our Health Department took swift action to investigate these cases and search not only for a common link, but for any continued possible exposure to our residents. I want to thank NJDOH and NJDEP for working with our staff to coordinate efforts to ensure our residents remain healthy. The symptoms of Legionnaires’ disease and COVID-19 can be very similar which makes it even more important that anyone experiencing these symptoms immediately contact their medical provider.”

Christopher Hellwig, the township’s newly hired health officer, in a press statement Friday said the risk to Hamilton residents “remains low” but that “Legionnaires’ disease can be a serious illness especially for those who are older or have underlying health concerns.”

“If you’re not feeling well and have respiratory illness-like symptoms such as fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, muscle aches and headache,” Hellwig added, “I encourage you to speak with your medical provider. Legionnaires’ disease can be successfully treated with antibiotics, and is not spread from person-to-person.”

A February 2016 article in the New England Journal of Medicine says evidence of person-to-person spread of Legionnaires’ disease is reported. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says such person-to-person transmission “may be possible under rare circumstances.”