



This is an official DHEC Health Advisory

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Investigation of a Legionellosis Cluster in Richland County

Summary

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) has recently identified cases of Legionnaires' disease and individuals with clinically compatible illness who work at a manufacturing facility located in Richland County, SC. DHEC is working alongside the facility management to notify its employees and implement appropriate mitigation measures. To help identify additional cases, recommendations are being provided regarding testing of individuals with community-acquired pneumonia or other severe respiratory illness.

Background

Legionella bacteria can cause two distinct types of illness: Legionnaires' disease, a serious form of pneumonia, and Pontiac Fever, a milder, self-limiting illness without pneumonia. *Legionella* is naturally found in freshwater environments, such as lakes and streams. However, these bacteria can become a health concern when they grow and spread in man-made systems that aerosolize water, such as jet sprayers, cooling towers, or other sources of water mists. These water systems are a common source of *Legionella* as they maintain temperatures within a favorable range for *Legionella* growth, create aerosols, and can advance the decay of residual disinfectants. Individuals may be exposed to *Legionella* when aerosolized water containing the bacteria is inhaled. Proper maintenance of these water systems is essential in preventing potential exposure.

Testing for *Legionella* infection in patients assists in guiding clinical treatment along with the detection and characterization of outbreaks. The clinical features of Legionnaires' disease include fever, cough, and clinical or radiographic pneumonia, while Pontiac Fever is often characterized by milder symptoms including fever, chills, and myalgia. The symptoms of Legionnaires' disease and Pontiac Fever are similar to illnesses and pneumonia caused by other pathogens; therefore, consider diagnostic testing for other common respiratory illnesses including influenza and COVID-19. Legionnaires' disease and Pontiac Fever can only be diagnosed by using a specific diagnostic test that is able to detect *Legionella* bacteria. Optimal diagnostic testing for *Legionella* includes cultures of lower respiratory secretions (e.g., sputum, bronchoalveolar lavage) on selective media and the *Legionella* urinary antigen test. As a best practice, national recommendations include concurrently obtaining sputum for culture and urine for the urinary antigen test. Individuals determined to have Legionnaires' disease require treatment with antibiotics.

More information regarding the diagnosis and testing for Legionnaires' disease can be found at: www.cdc.gov/legionella/downloads/fs-legionella-clinicians.pdf.

Recommendations for Providers

- In any patient who develops illness with pneumonia consider Legionnaires' disease and collect a history of possible exposures to aerosolized water, such as jet sprayers, cooling towers, hot tubs, showers, decorative fountains, or other sources of water mists where they live, work, or have visited.
- Consider diagnostic testing for other common respiratory illnesses including influenza and COVID-19.
- Obtain urine antigen testing for *Legionella* in all cases of community-acquired pneumonia, healthcare-associated pneumonia, or other severe lower respiratory disease without clear etiology.
- Obtain lower respiratory specimens (e.g., sputum, bronchoalveolar lavage) for culture on selective media prior to starting antibiotics.
- Report positive cases to DHEC as soon as possible, but no later than 3 days, after identification by contacting the Regional Public Health Office where the patient resides (see contact information for the Regional Public Health Offices below).

DHEC contact information for reportable diseases and reporting requirements

Reporting of **Legionellosis** is consistent with South Carolina Law requiring the reporting of diseases and conditions to your state or local public health department. (State Law # 44-29-10 and Regulation # 61-20) as per the DHEC 2022 List of Reportable Conditions available at:

<https://www.scdhec.gov/sites/default/files/Library/CR-009025.pdf>

Federal HIPAA legislation allows disclosure of protected health information, without consent of the individual, to public health authorities to collect and receive such information for the purpose of preventing or controlling disease. (HIPAA 45 CFR §164.512).

Regional Public Health Offices – 2022			
Mail or call reports to the Epidemiology Office in each Public Health Region			
MAIL TO:			
<u>Lowcountry</u> 4050 Bridge View Drive, Suite 600 N. Charleston, SC 29405 Fax: (843) 953-0051	<u>Midlands</u> 2000 Hampton Street Columbia, SC 29204 Fax: (803) 576-2993	<u>Pee Dee</u> 1931 Industrial Park Road Conway, SC 29526 Fax: (843) 915-6506	<u>Upstate</u> 352 Halton Road Greenville, SC 29607 Fax: (864) 282-4373
CALL TO:			
<u>Lowcountry</u> Allendale, Bamberg, Beaufort, Berkeley, Calhoun, Charleston, Colleton, Dorchester, Hampton, Jasper, Orangeburg Office: (843) 441-1091 Nights/Weekends: (843) 441-1091	<u>Midlands</u> Aiken, Barnwell, Chester, Edgefield, Fairfield, Kershaw, Lancaster, Lexington, Newberry, Richland, Saluda, York Office: (888) 801-1046 Nights/Weekends: (888) 801-1046	<u>Pee Dee</u> Clarendon, Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Georgetown, Horry, Lee, Marion, Marlboro, Sumter, Williamsburg Office: (843) 915-8886 Nights/Weekends: (843) 409-0695	<u>Upstate</u> Abbeville, Anderson, Cherokee, Greenville, Greenwood, Laurens, McCormick, Oconee, Pickens, Spartanburg, Union Office: (864) 372-3133 Nights/Weekends: (864) 423-6648
For information on reportable conditions, see https://www.scdhec.gov/ReportableConditions		<u>DHEC Bureau of Communicable Disease Prevention & Control</u> Division of Acute Disease Epidemiology 2100 Bull St • Columbia, SC 29201 Phone: (803) 898-0861 • Fax: (803) 898-0897 Nights / Weekends: 1-888-847-0902	

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert	Conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.
Health Advisory	Provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.
Health Update	Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.
Info Service	Provides general information that is not necessarily considered to be of an emergent nature.