

Health Officials Continue Investigation of Significant Legionnaires' Disease Outbreak in Western NC

Fletcher
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State and local health officials are [continuing an intensive investigation](#) into an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease in people who attended the NC Mountain State Fair held Sept. 6–15 at the Western North Carolina Agricultural Center in Fletcher, NC.

Fifty-three laboratory-confirmed Legionnaires' disease cases had been reported to the Division of Public Health as of Thursday, Sept. 26 from 10 counties and one other state, and more cases are still under investigation. Nearly 80 percent of patients identified so far have required hospitalization and one has died.

“Legionnaires' disease is a very serious illness, but it can be treated with antibiotics,” said Dr. Zack Moore, State Epidemiologist with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. “Our sympathies are with the loved ones of the person who passed away and with everyone who has been affected by this outbreak.”

[Legionnaires' disease](#) is a form of bacterial pneumonia (lung infection). A person can develop Legionnaires' disease when they breathe in mist or accidentally breathe water into the lungs that contains Legionella bacteria. Symptoms typically begin two to 10 days after exposure and can include cough, shortness of breath, fever, muscle aches and headaches. Anyone who attended the fair and has these symptoms should see a doctor right away and talk with them about the possibility of Legionnaires' disease.

Health officials have visited the Western North Carolina Agricultural Center and determined that there are not currently any significant sources for aerosolized water — small droplets such as mists or vapors that could pose a risk if contaminated with Legionella bacteria and inhaled into the lungs. Investigations are ongoing into other possible sources of aerosolized water that were present at the fair.

Health officials are also gathering information about possible sources of exposure to Legionella bacteria at the fair from everyone who has been sick with Legionnaires' disease.

“We will be reaching out by email to gather similar information from everyone who purchased fair tickets online,” said Dr. Moore. “Comparing information from people who got sick and people who did not is an important way for us to find out how people were exposed to Legionella. This will also help us understand how to prevent similar outbreaks in the future.”

For additional information or to report possible cases of Legionnaires' disease, please call the Division of Public Health at (919) 733-3419 or contact your local health department. A directory can be found at <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/county-health-departments>.

Updated case counts and information about the outbreak are available at <https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/legionellosis/outbreak.html>.

More information about Legionella bacteria and Legionnaires' disease can also be found on the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/legionella/index.html> and on the DPH website at <https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/diseases/legionellosis.html>.