Dear Resident:

We have recently seen an increase in the number of Legionnaires' disease cases being diagnosed within our county. Legionnaires' disease is a serious form of pneumonia that is spread from aerosolized water that has Legionella bacteria. We are providing this letter to you for your information only.

Legionella can be found in natural, freshwater environments, but they are present in insufficient numbers to cause disease. Showers, decorative fountains, humidifiers, whirlpools, hot tubs, saunas, respiratory therapy devices, cooling towers, and evaporative condensers have previously been shown to be sources of Legionnaires' disease outbreaks. These possible sources provide the 3 conditions needed for Legionella transmission-heat, stasis, and aerosolization. People get Legionnaires' disease when they breathe in a mist or vapor (small droplets of water in the air) that has been contaminated with the bacteria. One example might be from breathing in the bubbles from a whirlpool spa that has not been properly cleaned and disinfected. **The bacteria are not spread from one person to another person.**

People most at risk of getting sick from the bacteria are older people (usually 65 years of age or older), as well as people who are smokers, or those who have a chronic lung disease (like emphysema). People who have weak immune systems from diseases like cancer, diabetes, or kidney failure are also more likely to get sick from *Legionella* bacteria. People who take drugs to suppress (weaken) the immune system (like after a transplant operation or chemotherapy) are also at higher risk.

Legionnaires' disease can have symptoms like many other forms of pneumonia, so it can be hard to diagnose at first. Signs of the disease can include: a high fever, chills, and a cough. Some people may also suffer from muscle aches and headaches. Chest X-rays are needed to find the pneumonia caused by the bacteria, and other tests can be done on sputum (phlegm), as well as blood or urine to find evidence of the bacteria in the body.

These symptoms usually begin 2 to 14 days after being exposed to the bacteria.

A milder infection caused by the same type of *Legionella* bacteria is called ***Pontiac Fever***. The symptoms of Pontiac Fever usually last for 2 to 5 days and may also include fever, headaches, and muscle aches; however, there is no pneumonia. Symptoms go away on their own without treatment and without causing further problems.

Most cases can be treated successfully with antibiotics [drugs that kill bacteria in the body], and healthy people usually recover from infection.

Contact your healthcare provider if you are experiencing any of the above symptoms.

We are here to answer any questions, please do not hesitate to call us at Hocking County Health Department 740.385.3030 for more information.

Sincerely,

Doug Fisher

Health Commissioner