

LEGIONELLOSIS - AUSTRALIA (NEW SOUTH WALES)

A ProMED-mail post <<http://www.promedmail.org>>

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<<http://dailytelegraph.news.com.au/story.jsp?sectionid=1258&storyid=2661403>>

Alarm as more fall ill amid deadly outbreak

A further 7 cases of potentially deadly legionnaires' disease are now under investigation, after 5 cases were confirmed in Wollongong. The 5th person was identified as it was revealed that 3 air conditioning towers in Wollongong's Central Business District (CBD) were positive for legionella bacteria less than a week ago [2nd week of February 2005].

A 61-year-old Wollongong man, who started showing symptoms of the disease on 4 Feb 2005, is being treated at Wollongong hospital. 4 other men -- aged 35, 57, 75 and 84 -- were infected between 30 Dec 2004 and 25 Jan 2005. 7 other patients are under investigation after visiting their GPs or hospital emergency departments with pneumonia-like symptoms.

The earlier victims had visited Wollongong CBD before getting the disease, which is contracted through breathing contaminated air from air conditioning cooling towers or bacteria in potting mix [The potting mix organism is *Legionella longbeachae*, not the more usual *L. pneumophila* - Mod.LL].

The highest legionella count was found in the IMB Arcade cooling towers on Smith St., Wollongong. The council building in Burelli St. and Investment House on Smith St. also recorded the presence of legionella.

Doctor of infectious diseases and immunology at Sydney University, Ray Kearney, said health authorities were dealing with a "significant incidence well above average." He said there was a potential link between all 12 cases and the contaminated air conditioning units. "I can't say categorically that the air conditioning [units] with the bacteria in them are the source, but where there's contamination of water, the risk is very much there," he said.

South Eastern Sydney/Illawarra Health issued a statement, saying the source of the outbreak was too difficult to pinpoint. "The only thing we can say is that, based on our advice from council, with regard to the cleaning of those towers that had tested as positive, there is no evidence of any ongoing risk," a SESIHS spokeswoman said.

The Illawarra area had the world's 3rd largest outbreak of the disease in 1987, which resulted in 13 deaths and 53 cases of legionnaires' disease.

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[The city of Wollongong -- Australia's 9th largest city -- is located just south of Sydney, in the Illawarra region of New South Wales. It should be noted that Legionella sp. can be commonly isolated in cooling towers of commercial air conditioner units even without human cases. In order to prove the association with human cases, human isolates have to be shown in the laboratory to be identical to environmental isolates. - Mod.LL]

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<http://www.heraldsun.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,5478,12277959%255E1702,00.html>

New legionnaires' disease case confirmed

Health authorities on the New South Wales south coast have confirmed another case of the potentially deadly legionnaires' disease, bringing the total number of patients to 9.

A further 6 cases are under investigation, a spokeswoman for the South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra Health Service (SESIHS) said. The 9th case, a 68-year-old man, was in a stable condition in Wollongong Hospital, said the spokeswoman.

The health service would confirm later today, 17 Feb 2005, the status of 6 other patients who had recently presented with pneumonia-like symptoms. On Tue, 15 Feb 2005, a 68-year-old woman from central Wollongong was identified as the 8th case.

The SESIHS announced the outbreak on 11 Feb 2005, with 4 initial cases involving men ranging in ages from the mid-30s to 84 years. The men contracted the disease between 30 Dec 2004 and 11 Feb 2005. The health service began an in-depth epidemiology study to track the movements of patients, who all visited Wollongong's Central Business District.

"These movements will then be plotted on a map and we will be examining all of the maps to look for any common areas," director of the Illawarra Public Health Unit, Sarah Thackway said in a statement.

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