

LEGIONELLOSIS - NEW ZEALAND (SOUTH ISLAND)

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

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Christchurch public health officials are working round the clock on a new statistical study aimed at tracing the source of the city's legionnaire's disease outbreak.

A team, led by Canterbury District Health Board medical officer of health Alistair Humphrey, have reinterviewed 16 Christchurch victims, and the families of 3 people who died from the disease, to retrace their movements leading up to their becoming ill.

The public health officials have also interviewed another 57 Christchurch residents who form a control group. For each victim, 3 people of the same age and gender have been questioned about their movements, risk factors, and potential exposures.

Humphrey said the study, which should be complete today, aimed to build up a "biostatistical profile" of those who succumbed to the illness.

"When you have an outbreak, sometimes it is clearly obvious what the exposure is, and that can be confirmed microbiologically. In this case there is no obvious source," Humphrey said.

"Now we're looking for something out there that may be fairly subtle and that's why we're having to do a fairly detailed scientific study."

He said case-control studies had been done before to understand infectious disease outbreaks. Humphrey said his team had worked "extremely hard" to question all 76 people since Thursday and to input and analyse the results.

The team, which included public health officials, a biostatistician, epidemiologist, infectious disease physician, microbiologist and others, had worked "round the clock" and during the weekend in a bid to get an answer by today.

Meanwhile, work continued on cooling towers, with a large number already tested and samples sent to Environmental Science and Research for analysis. It was likely to be another week before the first results were known. An infected cooling tower remains the prime suspect for the source of the disease.

Legionnaires' cases have been concentrated in the west of the city, with victims from Sockburn, Hornby, Riccarton, and Fendalton, but cases have also been reported in St Albans, Lyttelton, and Rangiora.

A 20th person who contracted the disease lives on the West Coast but had been visiting Christchurch. No new cases were notified over the weekend.

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[ProMED awaits further information regarding the epidemiology of this outbreak. - Mod.LL]