

LEGIONELLOSIS, POTTING SOIL - NEW ZEALAND (SOUTH ISLAND)

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

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[1]

Date: Wed, 26 Oct 2005

From: ProMED-mail <promed@promedmail.org>

Source: News Talk ZB [edited]

<<http://www.newstalkzb.co.nz/newsdetail1.asp?storyID=82801>>

Health authorities in Christchurch are dismissing the coincidence of 2 outbreaks of legionnaires' disease in the city in 2005. An elderly man has died and 3 others have contracted the disease from potting mix and compost bags. This latest occurrence is not connected to the outbreak earlier in 2005 which left 3 people dead and was linked to cooling towers.

Medical Officer of Health Dr Alistair Humphrey does not consider the 2 outbreaks strange. He says the first outbreak was unusual, but cases linked to potting mix are nothing new and people often die from it. Dr Humphrey says gardeners need to take extra care when opening potting mixes or compost bags.

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[2]

Date: Wed, 26 Oct 2005

From: ProMED-mail <promed@promedmail.org>

Source: TV NZ [edited]

<<http://tvnz.co.nz/view/page/411749/622426>>

The death of a Christchurch man from bacteria inhaled from common gardening potting mix has prompted a nation-wide warning. Health officials say dust from potting mix and even garden compost can [cause] infection and should be treated carefully, especially during warm periods.

With the onset of some warm weather, gardeners up and down the country are being warned of the dangers potting mix following a death which has been linked to it.

Christchurch health officials say they've also treated 3 other people who've been in contact with potting mix who are now recovering satisfactorily. Gardening as a pastime has obvious benefits for health and fitness but for 4 Canterbury gardeners it's been anything but. 1 died and 3 others became sick after contracting legionnaires' disease from potting mix.

"Generally speaking it's inhaled which is why we advise people strongly to dampen down potting mix before they use it and to open bags away from them in case the bag is dried out and stuff flies up in front of their faces," says Canterbury Medical Officer of Health

Dr Alistair Humphrey. "And it's not as uncommon as you might think. We usually get between about 5 and 8 cases per year and a lot of those are *Legionella longbeachae* which is most of these cases," Dr. Humphrey said.

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L. longbeachae, originally described in 1981 (1), has been associated with lower respiratory infection in normal and immunocompromised individuals. The organism, especially in Australia, appears to be unique in being associated with pneumonia after exposure to soil. The organism has been found in soil and potting mixes from Australia but not from potting mix made in Europe.

Importantly, the legionellae from the soil and the Australian patients appear to be closely related (2,3). However, cases of *L. longbeachae* (see ProMED-mail posting: Legionellosis, potting soil - USA: May-Jun 2000 (20000904.1503)) associated with potting soil have been described in the USA and Japan (4,5) as well.

Additionally, a presumed outbreak of hospital-related *L. longbeachae* infection has been reported from Australia (6). The presumed source may have been related to demolition of a building adjacent to the health care facility.

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 6. Grove DI, Lawson PJ, Burgess JS, et al: An outbreak of *Legionella longbeachae* infection in an intensive care unit? *J Hosp Infect* 2002; 52:250-58.
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