



## News **Local News**

### **Garland tough on bacteria**

City among 1st requiring apartments to inspect for Legionnaires' culprit

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The Garland Health Department has become one of the first public health agencies in the world to require inspections for the bacteria that cause Legionnaires' disease.

A city ordinance revised last year requires every apartment complex that uses a cooling tower as part of its heating and air-conditioning system to have the tower inspected annually.

"It is a low-cost, noninvasive, proactive approach," said Richard Briley, the Health Department's managing director. "We don't know why more health departments aren't doing it, especially for the peace of mind it provides."

In the first round of inspections last year, nine of the 18 towers tested at 13 Garland apartment complexes were positive for legionella. After cleanups, all tested negative.

Mr. Briley said he realized a need for the testing after investigating a case in which a cooling tower had to be eliminated as the source of an illness. The opportunity to implement the program arose because the city was revising its minimum housing standards ordinance.

Dr. Matt Moore of the National Center for Immunizations and Respiratory Diseases at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta said Garland was the only U.S. city he knew of with such an ordinance. He said he knew of only two others in the world, one in the United Kingdom and another in France.

That may be because the disease doesn't get much attention until there's an outbreak, such as the one at an American Legion convention in Philadelphia in 1976 that infected more than 200 people, caused 34 deaths and gave the disease its name. Several similar outbreaks have occurred around the world since.

People get the disease by inhaling airborne water droplets contaminated with legionella bacteria, which grow best in warm water – in cooling towers, hot tubs and hot water tanks. Legionnaires' disease is not spread from person to person.

The disease mimics conventional pneumonia so well that it is seldom identified unless there is a cluster of victims. The CDC estimates that only about 10 percent of the thousands of cases that occur each year are reported.

"Dallas County Health and Human Services supports any city that wishes to encourage this type of testing to possibly prevent legionella cases in their municipalities," said Zachary Thompson, director of the county Health Department.

Inspections and lab tests cost about \$150 and can be done by city health inspectors or by companies approved by the city. Cleanup is relatively simple and usually can be done by the same contractors who maintain the heating and air-conditioning systems, Mr. Briley said.

The city also recommends, but doesn't require, testing for hospitals and nursing homes.

Vikki Yeatts, Garland's clinical services manager, said only nine cases of the disease were reported in Dallas County from January through November 2006, the most recent period for which figures are available. Five of those cases were reported in March. No cases were confirmed in Garland last year.

But Mr. Briley said it's better to be safe than sorry.

"We could be preventing people from getting sick," he said. "And nothing makes us feel better than that."

For more information, call the Garland Health Department at 972-205-3460.

## **LEGIONELLA IN GARLAND**

Garland has begun requiring annual tests for legionella, the bacteria that can cause Legionnaires' disease, in the cooling towers of all apartment complexes.

Symptoms, which usually begin two to 14 days after exposure, can include fever, chills, a cough and sometimes muscle aches, headaches and pneumonia. The disease can be fatal but is treatable with antibiotics. Healthy people usually recover. People most at risk are seniors, smokers, those with lung disease and those with immune systems weakened by cancer, diabetes and other diseases.

A less severe infection caused by the same bacteria is Pontiac Fever. Its symptoms – fever, chills and aches but no pneumonia – usually last two to five days and go away without treatment.

In initial testing last year, the bacteria were found in – and eliminated from – nine cooling towers at these six apartment complexes:

- Allandale, 2800 W. Walnut
- Meadowlark, 1226 S. Shiloh
- Miller Garden, 1214 W. Miller
- Orchard Square, 1520 Kingsley
- Parkside, 1901 Kingsley
- Spanish Villa, 110 S. Jupiter

SOURCES: City of Garland; U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

