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News

VIDEO: Selfridge officials say outbreak of Legionnaires' disease is over

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By Gordon Wilczynski, Macomb Daily Staff Writer

The lead epidemiologist investigating an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease at Selfridge Air National Guard Base in Harrison Township said Saturday there have been no new outbreaks in the past five days.

John F. Ambrose of the U.S Army Public Health Command also pointed out that an investigative team from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has pinpointed the focus of the probe to an area of two buildings. Ambrose would not disclose the exact location of the buildings. He said the outbreak is caused by a number of factors and not just one element.

"There are many pieces that must fit together," Ambrose said. "In the past couple of days we have been putting all of those pieces together in order to identify our source."

Ambrose said the investigators will continue to collect data in an effort to identify all factors that have contributed to the outbreak.

"We have six confirmed cases of Legionnaires' disease," Ambrose said. "We believe the efforts of the command of Selfridge to clean and sanitize and remove employees from the affected area may have prevented more cases."

Brig. Gen. Michael Peplinski, commander of the 127th Wing at Selfridge, said the investigation is being handled by a multi-disciplinary team of epidemiologists and doctors.

"Our missions and operations tempo are still at the pre-Legionnaires' outbreak level," Peplinski said. "My priority remains with making sure we have the safest environment for our work force and that they are healthy."

Peplinski said everyone at Selfridge has in their prayers those who are ill and their families.

In describing the problems that have suddenly struck Selfridge, Dr. Lee Hampton, of the Epidemic Logic Intelligence Service of the Centers for Disease Control, said Legionnaires' disease comes in two forms, Pontiac Fever and Legionnaires' disease.

He said Pontiac Fever is a flu-like illness that results in out-treatment after a few days.

Hampton said Legionnaires' disease is a form of pneumonia that can be serious unless treated with antibiotics.

“Outbreaks of Legionnaires’ is much rarer and a lot more serious illness,” Hampton said. “The Centers for Disease Control estimates that 8,000 to 18,000 are hospitalized annually in the United States with Legionnaires’ cases.”

He also said one in 20 cases of Legionnaires’ disease reported to the CDC each year is associated with outbreaks. The other 95 percent are individual cases that occur in communities throughout the United States and are not linked to specific sources, he said.

The CDC usually conducts an investigation when two cases are caused by Legionella bacteria and are connected to the same place, he added.

“An investigation is done in an attempt to identify and interview all of the individuals in the area with a disease caused by Legionella bacteria plus define the size of the outbreak and look for common exposures,” Hampton said.

“They then interview people who have worked in the same area who are not sick.”

Early symptoms of Legionnaires’ disease are much like the flu. After a short time more severe pneumonia-like symptoms may appear.

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