

## Five legionnaires cases in Northland

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The Northland District Health Board today issued a "low-risk" legionella alert after finding positives for legionella bacteria in five patients in different localities in the region.

Dr Loek (Loek) Henneveld, Northland Medical Officer of Health, told NZPA Northland normally had just two or three cases of legionnaires' disease a year.

"So this is an increase and we've issued the risk alert to put out word about the disease and its symptoms to tell people to be aware."

No deaths had occurred and only one of the five patients had needed hospital treatment.

Legionnaires' disease is a respiratory infection caused by the legionella bacteria commonly found in water and soils, including potting mix and compost.

It is not passed from person to person but the bacteria are inhaled from water vapour, aerosols or compost/potting mix dust.

Infections can be mild or more serious, sometimes fatal.

Symptoms include sudden high temperature and/or fever, dry cough, loss of appetite, headache, shortness of breath chills and muscle aches and headaches.

Dr Henneveld said the five positives did not appear to be linked or point to a single source.

The most likely cause of the present increase in legionellosis was the unusually warm, and at times humid, weather conditions.

"So we are sending out a broad alert to gardeners, owners of building with cooling towers and public spa pool owners."

He added at least two of the patients with positives were likely to have picked up the bacteria from potting mixes or compost.

"It is important that gardeners take precautions when using potting mix, avoid inhaling the mix dust when opening and handling the bag and heed warnings on the bags."

The DHB has also recommended building owners ensure regular maintenance of cooling towers and air conditioning systems is up to date.

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