

LEGIONELLOSIS - USA (02): (CALIFORNIA) CONFERENCE, SUSPECTED

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

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[1]

Date: Tue 15 Feb 2011

Source: Los Angeles Times [edited]

<<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2011/02/number-sickened-after-playboy-mansion-fundraiser-rises-to-200.html?lanow>>

Los Angeles County health officials said Tuesday [15 Feb 2011] that the number of people who have fallen ill after a 4-day conference that culminated in a fundraiser at the Playboy Mansion has reached 200, and that investigators have focused on the Playboy event as they look for the cause of the sickness.

The possible outbreak of legionellosis, or Pontiac fever, affected people connected with the DOMAINfest Global Conference, "with symptoms mostly consisting of fever, chills, general discomfort (malaise) and some cough," according to a statement by the county Department of Public Health.

More than 700 people from 30 countries attended the conference held at the Fairmont Miramar Hotel and Bungalows in Santa Monica 1-3 Feb 2011.

"The department is currently focusing its investigation on the social event that occurred at the Playboy Mansion, Holmby Hills, on 3 Feb 2011," the statement said, noting that, "Public Health has not yet determined that exposure is limited to a specific source from that event. There is no information suggesting that there is a risk of ongoing infection or that this outbreak extends beyond those individuals associated with this conference."

Many of those sickened after the conference have fully recovered, according to the statement, and they may not have suffered the same illness. "We are considering several possible causes of illness for this suspected outbreak," said Dr. Jonathan E. Fielding, the county's public health director.

"Not everyone with reported symptoms is likely to have the same illness, because a number of respiratory infections with similar symptoms are circulating," Fielding said. "We are working diligently to identify the causes, which may include viruses, bacteria or irritants." Teri Thomerson, a Playboy spokeswoman, released a statement Tuesday saying, "The Playboy Mansion continues to fully cooperate with the Department of Public Health in their investigation." She did not respond to further e-mails or phone calls.

The department was notified last Friday [11 Feb 2011] of a "suspected respiratory infection outbreak" among those associated with the conference for technology professionals in the domain name industry. The state Department of Public Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and surrounding county health departments have been providing assistance to county health officials.

Pontiac fever is not contagious, and most symptoms disappear in 2 to 5 days, according to the CDC. Legionnaires' disease is a type of pneumonia that usually responds to antibiotics,

although 5 percent to 30 percent of cases prove fatal, according to the CDC. A statement the department sent to conference attendees Friday noted that some at the conference had developed pneumonia.

Mason Cole, a spokesman for DOMAINfest organizer Oversee.net, encouraged conference attendees to get tested. "If you haven't been in touch with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health and you were a guest at one of these events, you should get in touch, even if you're healthy," said Cole. "At this stage, we're just trying to help the doctors figure out what this is. "There's so much speculation about what caused this, but we don't have any facts."

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[2]

Date: Tue 1 Mar 2011

Source: Los Angeles Times [edited]

<<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2011/03/playboy-mansion-outbreak-was-legionnaires-disease-officials-confirm.html>>

Los Angeles County public health officials have identified Legionella bacteria, which cause Legionnaires' disease, at a water source at the Playboy Mansion in Los Angeles in its investigation of the source of illness that sickened people after a fundraiser earlier this month [February 2011].

Public health officials have suspected Legionnaires' disease in the outbreak, a disease spread by bacteria that causes respiratory illness, such as a cough, and malaise, chills and fever.

Officials, however, have not ruled out other bacteria or viruses, because Legionella bacteria are commonly found in moist environments, Dr. Jonathan Fielding, director of the county Department of Public Health, said in a statement.

Health officials have said that the people fell ill after they attended DomainFest's 1-3 Feb 2011 conference, which culminated with a fundraiser at the Playboy Mansion in the Holmby Hills area of Los Angeles. DomainFest released a statement Tuesday [1 Mar 2011] that urged those who attended the 3 Feb 2011 fundraising event at the Playboy Mansion to fill out a confidential survey to assist health officials with their investigation.

The name of Legionnaires' disease stems from its discovery in 1976 when attendees of an American Legion convention in Philadelphia became sick with the bacteria and developed pneumonia. About 8000 to 18 000 people are hospitalized with the disease every year in the United States, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Healthy people usually recover from the bacterial disease, which can [be] treated with antibiotics, but death can occur in 5 percent to 30 percent of cases, the CDC said.

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[The number of persons attending the "Domainfest" conference who developed an illness consisting of fever, chills, malaise and coughing has increased from 80 to 200 since the last ProMED post on this outbreak (see ProMED post Legionellosis - USA: (CA) conference, susp 20110214.0494). The illness was said to have developed within 48 hours after the conference attendees left an event at the Los Angeles Playboy Mansion. Legionellosis was initially suspected to be the cause of the illness. However, because Legionella bacteria, the cause of

legionellosis, can be commonly found in a building's water supplies without linkage to any cases of legionellosis, the mere presence of this organism in the water supply is not sufficient proof that this is the source of an outbreak. Additional information is necessary.

Legionellosis is an infectious disease caused by a Gram-negative bacillus of the genus *Legionella*, most commonly *Legionella pneumophila*. Legionnaires' disease is the acute pneumonic form of the disease; about 70 per cent of cases are due to *L. pneumophila* serogroup 1. Pontiac fever is a non-pneumonic form of legionellosis that is much less severe than Legionnaires' disease. The incubation period for Legionnaires' disease is 2-14 days after exposure and for Pontiac fever, 24-48 hours after exposure, and the attack rate (per cent of persons who become ill after exposure to the source of an outbreak) for Legionnaires' disease is less than 5 per cent and for Pontiac fever, can be greater than 90 per cent (<http://www.cdc.gov/legionella/top10.htm>).

From the 1st news release above, apparently some of the conference attendees who developed pneumonia were suspected as having Legionnaires' disease, while the others were suspected as having Pontiac fever. The short incubation period, high attack rate of a febrile, non-fatal, non-pneumonic illness is consistent with an outbreak of Pontiac fever among persons exposed to a common source (<http://cid.oxfordjournals.org/content/44/2/229.full>). While *Legionella* can be isolated from respiratory secretions in patients with Legionnaires' disease, *Legionella* are virtually never isolated from patients with Pontiac fever (<http://www.cdc.gov/legionella/top10.htm>), and tests for urinary *Legionella* antigen, which are usually positive in patients with Legionnaires' disease, may be negative in patients with Pontiac fever.

The diagnosis of Pontiac fever is usually confirmed by development of antibodies to the *Legionella* isolated from an environmental source in a significant fraction of affected people exposed to the suspected source. Similarly, the diagnosis of Legionnaires' disease can also be confirmed by the development of antibodies to the *Legionella* isolated from an environmental source. We await the results of diagnostic testing of conference attendees.

Also, because *Legionella* may be found in water supplies without linkage to any cases, the actual causative source should be demonstrated by matching the genotype of the environmental isolates with that of any clinical isolates to assure frequently costly corrective measures are carried out on the actual source (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC86783/>; and <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2730281/>).

The "Domainfest" conference was held at the Fairmont Hotel in Santa Monica California, 31 Jan - 4 Feb 2011; over 700 Internet professionals attended from 30 countries (<http://www.domainfest.com/>). On the evening of 3 Feb 2011, a "fundraising" dinner party was held at the Playboy Mansion West for Jenny McCarthy's Generation Rescue Autism Foundation for attendees of "Domainfest" (<http://www.domainfest.com/agenda>). The Playboy Mansion is located in the Holmby Hills area of Los Angeles, California, west of Santa Monica (for a map, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holmby\\_Hills,\\_Los\\_Angeles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holmby_Hills,_Los_Angeles)). Buses transported conferees between the Playboy Mansion and the Santa Monica Fairmont Hotel (<http://domainfest.com/DOMAINFESTGlobal2011/domainsponsor-party>). - Mod.ML]