

Clinician Alert: LEGIONNAIRES' DISEASE

Information for clinicians – please distribute to all staff

- Five recent cases of confirmed infection with *Legionella pneumophila* have all spent time in the Sydney CBD during their exposure period.
- Have a high index of suspicion for people presenting with features of pneumonia. Collect a legionella urinary antigen and sputum culture.

Current situation

There is a cluster of 5 patients with *Legionella pneumophila* serogroup 1 infection, with symptom onsets between 30 March and 4 April. All visited Sydney CBD during their incubation periods. No single source for the cases has been identified, and it is possible that they are unrelated.

An investigation of a potential source in the area is underway.

Legionella pneumophila

- *Legionella pneumophila* bacteria can contaminate air conditioning cooling towers, whirlpool spas, shower heads and other bodies of water. People walking outside or driving past may be exposed if they inhale aerosolised contaminated water.
- Legionnaires' disease is not spread from person to person.
- The typical incubation period is 2 to 10 days, but more commonly 5 to 6 days.

Symptoms

- Symptoms usually include fever, chills, cough and dyspnoea. Cases may also have muscle aches, headache, fatigue, loss of appetite and diarrhoea.
- Cases may be critically unwell with pneumonia. Most people recover but the disease is occasionally fatal, particularly when it occurs with co-morbidities or immune suppression.

Diagnosis

- Consider *Legionella pneumophila* in patients presenting with consistent symptoms, especially those with travel to Sydney CBD in the 10 days prior to symptom onset.
- It is difficult to distinguish Legionnaires' disease from other types of pneumonia by symptoms alone. Chest X-rays help diagnose pneumonia, but the diagnosis of Legionnaires' disease requires special tests including:
 - urine for *Legionella* urinary antigen testing
 - sputum for *Legionella* culture and PCR

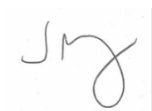
Note: Sputum culture should always be collected if possible, to enable matching of any isolates with environmental samples.

Management

- Treat as per [Therapeutic Guidelines: Antibiotic](#) guidelines for *Legionella* pneumonia (low-moderate severity: azithromycin, ciprofloxacin or doxycycline).
- For further management advice discuss with your local infectious disease specialist.
- Notify your local public health unit of any suspected case - phone **1300 066 055**.

Further information:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/legionnaires/Pages/default.aspx>



Dr Jeremy McAnulty

Executive Director, Health Protection NSW
09 April 2025