



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Lauderdale County Health Department investigates Legionella pneumonia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health is studying a recent increase in the number of cases of Legionella pneumonia in Florence, Ala. The usual number of cases of Legionella in northwest Alabama is about four cases per year. Because two patients with Legionella were reported to the Lauderdale County Health Department during the first week of October, the health department worked with local hospitals and doctors to find other patients with Legionella. The health department has identified 10 patients with Legionella pneumonia and is looking at five other possible cases.

As part of the process, the health department is working with physicians and hospitals, talking with the patients who had Legionella pneumonia, and checking for any potential environmental sources of the germ. There have not been any new cases of Legionella reported since the first week of October, but the health department continues to monitor the situation very closely.

Dr. Karen Landers, Assistant State Health Officer for the Alabama Department of Public Health, stated, "We have an excellent medical community in Northwest Alabama, and out of an abundance of caution, we want to look into this carefully to be sure that we raise awareness to be checking for this illness and recommend any actions to reduce environmental risks."

Legionella pneumonia is not spread from person to person. People get Legionella pneumonia when they breathe in a mist or vapor containing the bacteria. Most healthy people exposed to the germ do not become sick. People at higher risk for getting sick are those who are older than 50, are current or former smokers, have chronic lung problems like COPD, have weak immune systems from cancer, diabetes, or kidney failure, or are on chemotherapy.

Legionella pneumonia is caused by a germ that occurs naturally in the environment. The germ grows best in warm water. Some places where the germ can be found include hot tubs, cooling towers, hot water tanks, large plumbing systems, and decorative fountains.

For additional information, please contact your local health department.