Legionnaires' Disease Sickens and Kills New Yorkers

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New York City health officials today confirmed that more than 80 people have become ill and seven people have died from a recent outbreak of Legionnaires' disease in the Bronx, the Wall Street Journal reports.

Legionnaires' disease is an airborne bacterial illness that can spread through air-conditioning systems used to keep cool during the summer.

According to an earlier report by The New York Times, New York City public health officials said 42 people were initially hospitalized with the illness, which resembles a "severe form of pneumonia." Thanks to swift medical attention, 19 of those folks who were initially hospitalized with the infection recovered enough to be released.

Inspectors said they tested 22 buildings in the Bronx for the presence of legionella bacteria, which causes the disease. At that time, three buildings tested positive for the bacteria: the Opera House Hotel, Lincoln Medical and Mental Health Center, and Concourse Plaza, an outdoor shopping mall and movie theater that's popular in the borough.

Experts said most people get Legionnaires' disease from inhaling the bacteria, and that the illness is generally not spread through person-to-person contact. Older adults, smokers and people with weakened immune systems are particularly susceptible to the disease.

Early symptoms of Legionnaires' disease include: headache, muscle pain, chills and a fever of 104 degrees Fahrenheit or higher. By the second or third day, patients may cough up mucus or blood, and suffer shortness of breath, chest pain, and gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, as well as confusion or other mental changes.

Fortunately, Legionnaires' disease can be effectively treated with antibiotics. The sooner treatment starts, the less likely the chance of serious complications or death.

Summertime is ripe for bacterial infections of all kinds. Click here to read more.

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