



Newark Residences Should Be Alert to Signs of Illness After Water Interruptions

For Immediate Release
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As Newark residents have water service restored following the water main break in and around the city, the Alliance to Prevent Legionnaires' Disease (APLD) cautions residents to be aware of the signs of Legionnaires' disease in the coming weeks. *Legionella*, the bacteria that causes Legionnaires' disease, can be found in reservoir sources and throughout the biofilms inside water supply distribution systems. It is a health concern when biofilm is disrupted and releases the bacteria into the drinking water supplying homes and places with significant human exposure.

While water systems throughout New Jersey are generally well-managed, disruptions caused by water main breaks often result in significant water pressure and water flow changes in distribution lines that can dislodge biofilms and release bacteria and other contaminants downstream to residents – a particular risk for the immune-compromised, elderly and those with comorbidities.

“The summer heat and lack of movement of water in the distribution system during this week’s disruption from the water main break can create a favorable environment for *Legionella* and other pathogens to proliferate and enter the internal plumbing of buildings where it can continue to grow,” said APLD Board Member and Director of Integrated Resource Management Bob Bowcock. “This is concerning because people are exposed daily to water in their very own homes. Bathing, particularly showering, can put some residents at-risk from *Legionella* if water delivered to homes contains the bacteria.”

Legionnaires' disease is a pneumonia, which can cause flu-like symptoms and lung inflammation. It is not contagious. It is contracted when *Legionella* bacteria enters the lungs through inhalation of water droplets or aspiration – “goes down the wrong pipe” – while drinking water. Symptoms of Legionnaires' disease include cough, fever, chills, aches, shortness of breath, and diarrhea, and can easily be confused with COVID infections.

“Newark residents, particularly those with compromised immune systems, should be aware of the symptoms of Legionnaires' disease to mitigate risks posed from this disruption to their water supply,” said Dr. Hung Cheung, APLD Board member and Head of Cogency Environmental. “I urge anyone to seek medical attention immediately if you experience any of these symptoms and do not be afraid to ask your doctor about the possibility that your symptoms could be Legionnaires' disease so they can evaluate whether a test would make sense.”

Dr. Cheung also encourages medical professionals to be alert and evaluate patients for Legionnaires' disease when these symptoms are present. “Having a high index of suspicion is crucial, as early diagnosis is critical in determining a patient’s treatment options and prognosis. Legionnaires' disease can be treated with antibiotics.”

Risk factors that make individuals more susceptible to contracting Legionnaires' disease include, age, those 50 and older, current or former smokers, individuals with asthma, chronic lung disease, comorbidities, or other conditions like cancer which causes a suppressed immune system. Please know that exposure to *Legionella* bacteria does not mean an individual will always contract Legionnaires' disease.

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The Alliance to Prevent Legionnaires' Disease is a non-profit organization dedicated to *reducing the occurrence of Legionnaires' disease by promoting public research and education on the disease, and best practices and policy for its prevention.* Visit preventlegionnaires.org for more information.