



Recommendations to Industries to Prevent Community Outbreaks of Legionellosis

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) has recently conducted investigations of large, facility-associated outbreaks of *Legionellosis* resulting in severe illnesses and deaths among workers and others in the facilities. The recommendations in this document are meant to help industries reduce the risk of exposure to *Legionella* bacteria and prevent future illnesses.

Legionella is a bacterium that is naturally occurring, particularly in freshwater lakes and streams, and can also grow in man-made water systems. If water containing *Legionella* is aerosolized and then inhaled, it can result in an infection known as Legionellosis (Legionnaire's disease or Pontiac Fever). These diseases are not usually transmitted from person-to-person.

Legionnaires' disease (LD) is a pneumonia caused by *Legionella* and includes symptoms of fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath and muscle aches. LD is a serious illness: About 1 in 10 people who get it will die. Pontiac fever is a milder infection than LD that does not include pneumonia; its flu-like symptoms primarily include fever and muscle ache.

In the past three years, DHEC has investigated 13 significant *Legionella* clusters in South Carolina involving a total of 78 cases and 3 deaths. In 2023 the total number of *Legionella* clusters, investigated by DHEC, was more than the clusters reported in 2021 and 2022 combined. This year the agency is working proactively to prevent additional outbreaks.

DHEC recommends the following measures for all facilities (including manufacturing, industrial, schools, multi-story office complexes, hotels, car washes or any other operation that have cooling towers, water attractions or equipment that aerosolizes water):

- If you do not already have one established, develop and use a water management plan that is monitored by professionals with expertise in the plumbing systems and equipment in your facility, as well as with recommended disinfection procedures.
- Become a member of or follow guidelines and Policy Statements of the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), which provides educational and technical information which reflect the best industry practices.

Please note that the plan should address *Legionella* and must include key elements from the enclosed "Considerations for a Water Management Plan."

Should there be any questions about developing a facility-specific water management plan, please contact the Waterborne Disease Epidemiologist with the DHEC Division of Acute Disease Epidemiology by emailing: GrahamVE@dhec.sc.gov.

Thank you,

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