

Five Young Workers Hospitalized in Legionnaires' Disease Outbreak

The Challenge

Legionnaires' disease, a type of pneumonia caused by the bacteria *Legionella*, usually occurs in older people and is associated with indoor environments – for example, hotels or other sealed buildings with water cooling towers for air conditioning systems. When five young workers at an outdoor automobile shredding facility were reported to the NYS Department of Health (NYSDOH) Occupational Lung Disease Registry with Legionnaires' disease, it was clear that a public health response was needed to better understand this unusual outbreak.

The Response

Upon recommendation from NYSDOH, the owner of the facility requested a Health Hazard Evaluation (HHE) from CDC/NIOSH. CDC/NIOSH put together a field team, collected samples for *Legionella*, performed air monitoring, and interviewed employees. The team observed a large amount of standing water as a result of water being used to cool and lubricate the shredder. Samples of water from numerous locations around the facility tested positive for *Legionella*. NIOSH's recommendations to the employer included eliminating standing water, having workers wear protective respirators, disinfecting conveyors and the shredder, having a scheduled cleaning program, using less water in the operation, and enforcing a no-smoking policy.



The Impact

No further cases have been identified at the facility since the owner implemented the recommendations. This is the first known report linking automobile shredders to an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease. The outbreak serves as a valuable reminder that health care professionals should ask about worker occupations and consider testing workers in these settings if they report with an acute respiratory illness with symptoms. This public health response highlights the value of collaboration between state and local health departments and CDC/NIOSH in investigating unusual or complex occupational exposures.

For more information, visit the NYSDOH occupational health surveillance program and NIOSH HHE web pages:

NYSDOH: www.health.ny.gov/environmental/workplace/occupational_health_surveillance/

NIOSH: www.cdc.gov/niosh/hhe/

A copy of the complete investigation report is at
<http://wwwtest.cdc.gov/niosh/hhe/reports/pdfs/2011-0109-3162.pdf>