

Legionnaires' outbreak brings Scottish distillery to a halt

June 8 2012

A Scottish whisky distillery at the centre of an investigation into an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease that has infected up to 74 people has temporarily halted production, it said Friday.

The North British Distillery in Edinburgh, which is under investigation over 28 confirmed and 46 suspected cases of the disease, said it had closed its cooling towers as a "precautionary" measure and halted distillation.

A 56-year-old man has died since the outbreak was discovered last Thursday in the southwest of the capital, and 14 patients are in intensive care.

"On Thursday 7 June we voluntarily took our cooling towers off-line until the legionella results from samples taken earlier this week are reported," a spokesman for the North British Distillery said.

"While this precautionary operation is under way we have temporarily ceased [distillation](#)."

Britain's Health and Safety Executive (HSE) believes the distillery may have adequately failed to control the risk of legionella -- the bacteria that causes Legionnaires' disease -- in one of its cooling towers.

But the independent watchdog said the tower was not necessarily the source of the outbreak, and the distillery is only one of six sites under

investigation.

"The source of the outbreak may never be conclusively identified, based on our experience from previous outbreaks," the HSE said.

Most outdoor outbreaks of the disease, which leads to a severe form of pneumonia that can be fatal, are linked to industrial cooling towers.

Towers at four sites in the area have been "shock dosed" with chemicals to treat [bacterial growth](#), Scotland's [health minister](#) Nicola Sturgeon said on Thursday.

Legionnaires' is contracted through inhalation of contaminated [water droplets](#) and is not known to be transmitted from person to person.

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