

NYC mayor: Legionnaires' outbreak has claimed 12 lives

August 10 2015



New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio holds a map showing the location in the Bronx borough of cooling towers, red triangles, and people, red dots, that were infected with Legionnaires' disease during a news conference to provide an update of the Legionnaires' disease outbreak, Saturday, Aug. 8, 2015, in New York. Ten people have died and 101 have been sickened amid the largest outbreak of Legionnaires, disease in New York City's history. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)

Two more people in the Bronx have died of Legionnaires' disease,

bringing the total of fatalities to 12 in the largest outbreak of the disease in New York City history, officials said Monday.

There are now 113 reported cases of Legionnaires' in the Bronx, and cooling towers in 15 buildings have tested positive for the legionella bacteria, officials said. While cleaning crews crisscrossed the Bronx, the continued tension between state and city governments threaten to undermine officials' expressions of confidence that the outbreak is tapering off.

The outbreak has become the city's most significant public health crisis since last fall's Ebola scare. For more than a month now, cases of Legionnaires'—a form of pneumonia especially dangerous for the elderly and for people with underlying health issues—have been reported throughout a section of the South Bronx, the city's poorest neighborhood.

"We are dealing with a new set of realities we have never experienced that we have never encountered before in this city," said de Blasio, who added that the nation's largest city has had to create "a playbook" on the fly as to how to handle the crisis.

The identities of the deceased were not released.

Officials said that all but one of the 12 fatalities was more than 40 years old and all of them had underlying health problems. Because the disease has a 10-day incubation period there can be a lag in reporting cases, but de Blasio said Monday that city health officials believe there hasn't been a new diagnosis since Aug. 3.



New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio speaks during a news conference to provide an update of the Legionnaires' disease outbreak, Saturday, Aug. 8, 2015, in New York. Ten people have died and 101 have been sickened amid the largest outbreak of Legionnaires, disease in New York City's history. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)

He and City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito introduced legislation that mandates inspections of cooling towers, which are rooftop mechanical structures used to cool large buildings. They eject a warm mist that can carry the bacteria.

As de Blasio spoke at the afternoon news conference, New Yorkers saw a split-screen image on their TVs that likely did not inspire much faith in the level of coordination between the city and state governments.

While de Blasio spoke at City Hall, Gov. Andrew Cuomo was holding his own news conference at his New York City office on the very same

subject yet delivering different information. Staffers with both men did not say why the officials held separate events.

At his, Cuomo said that state teams—who have been inspecting cooling towers in the Bronx the last three days—had discovered the legionella bacteria in three buildings. But unaware of that discovery, de Blasio said that the bacteria had only been located in 12 towers, not the updated total of 15.

A Cuomo spokeswoman said later that Dr. Howard Zucker, the state health commissioner, had called his city equivalent, Dr. Mary Bassett, to brief her on the discovery and left a message, since Bassett was already at de Blasio's news conference. Cuomo was then briefed on the findings, which led to the governor telling the media and public before the mayor.



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York. Ten people have died and 101 have been sickened amid the largest outbreak of Legionnaires, disease in New York City's history. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)

The mix-up—and resulting questions from reporters to the mayor about the inconsistency, which clearly irritated de Blasio—was the latest chapter in the ongoing feud between the mayor and governor, who are both Democrats and claim to be friends.

Cuomo drew de Blasio's ire last week when, in a seeming criticism of the city's response to the outbreak, said that "we're taking matters into our own hands" and ordered state inspection teams into the Bronx. He reiterated that Monday.

"We have been aggressive," Cuomo said about the state's response. "The aggressiveness was called for."

The state is focusing on buildings outside the immediate impact zone, while the city's teams are working within it. Bassett issued a commissioner's order to clean all cooling towers in the city within the next 10 days.

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Citation: NYC mayor: Legionnaires' outbreak has claimed 12 lives (2015, August 10) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-08-nyc-mayor-legionnaires-outbreak.html>

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