

Legionnaires' death toll rises to 10 in western Illinois

September 9 2015, by Alan Scher Zagier

At least 10 people in western Illinois have now died from Legionnaires' disease, after a state veterans home reported two new fatalities among its residents.

An outbreak first identified in late August after an initial case was detected several weeks earlier has sickened 53 residents at the Quincy home, nine of whom died. Four others in Quincy have been diagnosed with the illness, one of whom died. Officials say those cases aren't connected to the larger outbreak.

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs said Wednesday that it planned to disinfect [water systems](#) at the veterans home with chlorine after previously cleaning its hot water tanks and air conditioning system and shutting down decorative and drinking water fountains and other potential sources of aerosolized water.

Residents at the facility continue to rely on bottled water and sponge baths as a precaution. The disease is mostly contracted through inhaling bacteria—transmitted in mist or vapor—that thrives in warm water.

An epidemiological team from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention remains at the 129-year-old facility to assist an investigation by the Illinois Department of Public Health. The source of the outbreak remains undetermined.

Ryan Yantis, a spokesman for the Illinois Department of Veterans

Affairs, said the age and size of the sprawling state complex has "posed a very complex set of challenges" to both determine the source of the infectious disease and to prevent its spread. The facility consists of 48 separate buildings on more than 200 acres, with 400 residents spread across seven buildings.

Of the two new deaths reported, one occurred Wednesday. The other involved a previous fatality that was added to the death toll after test results confirmed Legionnaires' on Tuesday.

An average of 200 people in Illinois are sickened from the disease each year, and CDC officials have said that the a spate of outbreaks in Illinois, California and New York so far this year is not unusual—although the number of patients involved is larger than that typically seen.

Melaney Arnold, a spokeswoman for the Illinois Department of Public Health, suggested that the handful of cases not related to the veterans home outbreak could be due to "heightened awareness" among doctors who otherwise might have attributed their patients' sicknesses to pneumonia.

The vast majority of those sickened by Legionnaires' [disease](#) in Quincy have been elderly and had underlying medical conditions that increased their risk of exposure to the Legionella bacteria.

Shay Drummond, director of clinical and environmental services for Adams County, said the average age of those who died is 88.

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