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County Executive

Sherlita Amler, M.D.
Commissioner of Health

ATTENTION

Public Health Update

The Westchester County Department of Health provides public health updates on important issues affecting public health in Westchester

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HEALTH COMMISSIONER URGES INSTITUTIONS AND BUILDING OWNERS TO PREVENT LEGIONNAIRES DISEASE BY CLEANING AND DISINFECTING THEIR COOLING TOWERS OR EVAPORATIVE CONDENSERS;
FREE BUILDING TESTING AVAILABLE THROUGH NEW YORK STATE

*Email Box and Hotlines to Facilitate Sample Collection and Testing:
Legionella@health.ny.gov or 888-769-7243 or 518-485-1159*

Westchester County Health Commissioner Sherlita Amler, MD, is urging the owners of all buildings with air conditioning cooling towers to make sure the equipment is clean, disinfected and in proper working order as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of Legionnaire's Disease.

"While there is no known Westchester connection to the Legionnaire's Disease outbreak in the Bronx, prudence dictates vigilant maintenance by building owners to prevent this bacteria from growing during the summer months," Dr. Amler said. "Building owners should verify that their contractor or maintenance departments follow industry and manufacturer's standards for cleaning and disinfecting cooling towers and evaporative condensers."

Legionella exists naturally in water and moist soil and is found in creeks and ponds, hot water tanks, water in air conditioning cooling towers and evaporative condensers. Growth of this bacteria is controlled by regular and frequent disinfection and maintenance. High concentrations of the bacteria can be dangerous, especially for older people, people with chronic lung diseases or who are immune-compromised or immune-suppressed and current and former smokers.

Dr. Amler advised that municipalities, schools, hospitals, nursing homes, colleges, hotels, malls and other industrial, commercial or high-rise residential buildings throughout Westchester should all be checking their air conditioning equipment.

"By properly cleaning and disinfecting their cooling towers and evaporative condensers, Westchester building owners and managers can reduce the risk of exposure for their building occupants and neighbors," Dr. Amler said. "To verify that Legionella is not of concern on their property, Westchester building owners can take advantage of free testing now being offered by the New York State Department of Health."

The free testing is available through the New York State Department of Health's Wadsworth Center Laboratory. This service will be available until October, when temperatures cool and the growth of Legionella is less of a concern. The testing is part of the state's effort to assist New York City, which has had 10 deaths associated with a Legionnaire's Disease outbreak in the Bronx..

To arrange for free Legionella sample testing, call 888-769-7243 or 518-485-1159, Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm. Building owners, operators, managers, and landlords who wish to have NYSDOH test for Legionella should send the name and address to which the kit should be mailed, and a working phone number to: Legionella@health.ny.gov. The state health department will send an appropriate sampling kit with simple instructions for sample collection. If the test shows dangerous levels of Legionella or other bacteria, the state health department will provide clear guidelines for disinfecting these systems.

Legionnaires' Disease is not spread person-to-person. Its symptoms include cough, shortness of breath, high fever, muscle aches and headache.

For more information on the best practices to prevent the growth or spread of Legionella, go to www.ashrae.org and https://www.osha.gov/dts/osta/otm/legionnaires/cool_evap.html#Maintenance . More information is available at www.westchestergov.com/health