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Precautions for preventing Legionella during hot weather

The Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD) is reminding people to take precautions when gardening and cleaning around stagnant water sources, as the warm weather increases the risk of Legionnaires' disease.

Legionnaires' disease is an infection of the lungs (pneumonia) caused by bacteria of the Legionella family. Infection occurs when a person breathes in bacteria commonly found in the environment. Bacteria can grow to high numbers in warm, stagnant water and is often found in soil and potting mix.

ISLHD Acting Director of Public Health Diane Lovatt said simple precautions can reduce the likelihood of becoming infected.

“Wear a mask when handling potting mixes and soils or water that has been sitting still for long periods, such as in bird baths and fountains, and be sure to wash your hands after, particularly before eating, drinking or smoking.”

“It’s also important to make sure that water in spas is appropriately treated according to the manufacturer’s guidelines.”

Ms Lovatt said people who do become sick usually experience symptoms two to 10 days after being exposed to the bacteria.

“Symptoms can include fever, chills, a cough and shortness of breath. Some people also have muscle aches, headache, tiredness, loss of appetite and diarrhoea.

“Whilst some people with Legionella can become very sick with pneumonia, most recover quickly with appropriate antibiotic treatment” she said.

Anyone experiencing symptoms who think they may have been exposed to Legionella should see their GP or visit a Medical Centre. The Healthdirect helpline is also available 24-hours a day on 1800 022 222 for health advice.

Across the Illawarra Shoalhaven there were nine cases of Legionellosis during 2018. Three isolated incidences of Legionellosis were reported in December 2018.

Additional information about Legionnaires' disease, including and symptoms and guidelines for the management of water systems can be found on the NSW Health website: <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/legionellacontrol/Pages/default.aspx>