

NEWS BRIEF

Provided by: Venbrook Insurance Services

Coronavirus Building Closures May Cause Increased Risk of Legionnaires' Disease

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has caused many commercial buildings to close for extended periods of time. Now, as some businesses begin taking steps to resume their operations, it is important to be aware of another potentially deadly respiratory infection that could be lying in wait.

Legionnaires' disease is a form of pneumonia caused by Legionella bacteria. A person can contract the disease by ingesting contaminated water or inhaling contaminated water vapor.

Legionella is found naturally in lakes, ponds and streams, but can also contaminate water systems in buildings. Due to widespread closures, pipes and HVAC systems have not been getting as much use as usual. As a result, it is possible that stagnant water has provided ideal conditions for the growth of Legionella.

When reopening a commercial building that has been vacant or underutilized for longer than three weeks, it is important that the pipes are properly flushed and sanitized.

Legionnaires' disease may initially resemble the flu, with symptoms including:

- Low fever
- Headache
- Joint and muscle aches
- Low energy and fatigue
- Loss of appetite

More severe symptoms of the disease will be pneumonia-like, such as:

- High fever

- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Chills
- Chest pains

Due to widespread closures, pipes and HVAC systems have not been getting as much use as usual. As a result, it is possible that stagnant water has provided ideal conditions for the growth of Legionella.

Environmental health and safety professionals can test water samples for the presence of Legionella bacteria. Air testing may produce false negatives, and is therefore not recommended.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 1 in 10 people who contract Legionnaires' disease will die from the infection. Most cases can be treated with antibiotics. Legionnaires' disease cannot be transmitted from person to person.

Click [here](#) for more information on Legionnaires' disease.

