

LONG ISLAND / NASSAU

# Equipment checked, samples taken in hunt for source of deadly Legionnaires' outbreak



An illustration featuring Legionella bacteria. Legionnaires' disease typically is contracted when people breathe in a mist or vapor containing the bacteria, and it is not spread person-to-person, according to the state Department of Health. Credit: Getty Images / iStockphoto/Dr\_Microbe

By **David Olson**

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Nassau County employees Saturday continued to look for air conditioning cooling towers and other equipment in Levittown and Wantagh that could be harboring the bacteria that led to an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease that has killed one person and sent nine more to hospitals.

County environmental employees are taking water samples from the equipment, and those samples are being sent to the state's Wadsworth Center laboratory in Albany for analysis, Nassau health department spokeswoman Mary Ellen Laurain said. Results are not expected for more than a week, because the bacteria cultures typically take about 10 days to grow, she said.

All 10 people sickened by the Legionella bacteria in the past few weeks lived within a half mile of Wantagh Avenue and Old Jerusalem Road on the Levittown/Wantagh border, she said. They were aged 35 to 96, she said. The person who died was over 50 and with underlying medical conditions, Laurain said.

Most people don't get sick from the bacteria, but those 50 and older, smokers and people with certain health conditions, such as cancer and diabetes, are among those at higher risk for getting ill, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

People usually contract the bacteria by breathing in a mist or vapor containing Legionella. It is not spread person-to-person, according to the state Health Department.

But the bacteria in the mist can travel as far as a mile and sicken someone sitting outside blocks away, said Janet Stout, president of Pittsburgh-based Special Pathogens Laboratory, which focuses on research and prevention of Legionnaires' disease.

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