

Bacterium that causes legionnaires' disease found in Toronto home for seniors

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A resident of a Stouffville long-term-care facility who had tested positive for legionnaires' disease has died.

But it is not clear whether the individual, who had resided at Bloomington Cove, which houses 112 residents, died of the disease or other health problems, according to York Region public health officials.

The region was notified at the beginning of October that a resident had tested positive for legionnaires' disease, which is a reportable disease in Ontario.

Health officials found evidence of the bacterium that causes the disease and have worked with the facility to put precautionary measures in place to protect the health of residents, said Joy Marshall, acting director of infectious disease for York Region.

These measures include waterless bathing, using bottled water for drinking and cooking and closing the toilet lids when flushing, Marshall said.

Legionnaires' disease, which is treatable with antibiotics, is not spread person-to-person. Rather, Marshall said, it is spread through aerosolized water or with contact with soil.

"So you can't make any direct linkages that if a person has it, they got it from the facility," she said. "Unfortunately, it's in our environment."

Family members were notified on the weekend that the legionella pneumophila bacterium was found at the facility.

Marshall said there is no cause for concern, either in the community or at the long-term-care facility.

On average, York Region will have between two and five cases of legionnaires' disease each year.

"We have not seen any indication that our numbers are going up this year," Marshall said, noting residents at the long-term-care facility are being closely monitored for any signs or symptoms of the disease.

“In this particular situation, everything is going on as recommended,” she said. “There have been precautionary measures taking place.”

In 2005, an outbreak of legionnaires’ disease in a Scarborough nursing home killed more than 20 people. After launching an investigation, public health officials found legionella bacteria in the air-cooling tower atop the residence. Officials said the bacteria were spread throughout the home via the ventilation system.