

## **Legionnaire's disease discovered at Plant City mobile home park; one dead**

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In Print: Tuesday, October 18, 2011

PLANT CITY — One resident of a mobile home park died, and two others were sickened, after coming down with Legionnaires' disease, health officials said Monday.

The three people lived at the Meadows at Countrywood, a 55-and-older community with 799 mobile homes in Plant City.

They were not relatives and didn't live together, said Hillsborough County Health Department spokesman Steve Huard.

"It is a little alarming that one of (the cases) resulted in death and that it's all in one community," he said. "We want to know where the source is, if we could possibly determine that, to protect the remainder of the community."

As a precaution, health officials closed two swimming pools and two hot tubs, potential origins of the disease, at the park.

Citing privacy concerns, the Health Department didn't release the identities or genders of the victims. The president of the residents' association said the victim who died was a man.

Health officials learned of the cases Friday, when the three had shown up at the same hospital. One died Saturday. The others remain under medical care.

Legionnaires' disease is caused by a naturally occurring bacteria that grows best in warm water, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. People can contract the disease when they breathe mist or vapor contaminated with the bacteria.

So far this year, Hillsborough County reported four other isolated cases of Legionnaires' disease, Huard said. He could not recall any other recent fatal case of the infection in the county.

Huard said officials don't believe the three victims were together outside of the park.

"We're not having a lot of luck tying the people together," he said.

Not all who are exposed to the Legionella bacteria fall ill, but people ages 65 and older are among those most at risk.

Patients with Legionnaires' disease exhibit symptoms similar to other forms of respiratory disease, so the CDC says it can be difficult to diagnose.

In 2005, a nurse's death and another employee's illness sparked concerns of Legionnaires' disease at the James A. Haley VA Medical Center in Tampa. The nurse's cause of death was described as "atypical pneumonia" and tests did not find any Legionella bacteria at the medical center.

In 2001, seven bailiffs at the Pinellas County Courthouse complex on 49th Street who tested positive for exposure to Legionella bacteria sparked fear of an outbreak there.

But health officials said the blood tests showed only that the bailiffs had been exposed to the bacteria sometime in their lives, and there was no evidence that the bacteria originated in the courthouse.

But that same kind of speculation has started at Meadows at Countrywood, said Jim Butterworth, president of the residents' association.

Residents, he said, haven't heard much official word. He said he had been told that the pools and hot tubs were closed because of a chlorine deficiency.

Residents began buzzing about Legionnaires' disease on Sunday after some discussed it at a church service.

Since then, Butterworth said he has been fielding phone calls, trying to curb speculation among residents.

"Gossip is their worst enemy," he said. "Fear, for them, is going to be worse than what's happened."

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