



Association of Local
PUBLIC HEALTH
Agencies

alPHa's members are
the public health units
in Ontario.

alPHa Sections:

Boards of Health
Section

Council of Ontario
Medical Officers of
Health (COMOH)

**Affiliate
Organizations:**

Association of Ontario
Public Health Business
Administrators

Association of
Public Health
Epidemiologists
in Ontario

Association of
Supervisors of Public
Health Inspectors of
Ontario

Health Promotion
Ontario

Ontario Association of
Public Health Dentistry

Ontario Association of
Public Health Nursing
Leaders

Ontario Dietitians in
Public Health

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October 14, 2022

Hon. Steve Clark,
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
College Park 17th Flr, 777 Bay St,
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Dear Minister Clark,

Re. alPHa Resolution A22-3 - Provincial Cooling Tower Registry for the Public Health Management of Legionella Outbreaks

On behalf of member Medical Officers of Health, Boards of Health, and Affiliate organizations of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa), I am writing to reiterate the need for action on the attached resolution, which was passed at alPHa's 2022 Annual General Meeting.

With thanks for your response to our original letter dated July 18, which indicated that you were unable to commit to a meeting to discuss this issue at that time, we would appreciate reconsideration following last week's announcement that the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit is investigating a cluster of Legionnaire's disease cases in Orillia (please see attached news release).

Aerosolization of legionella from cooling towers is a significant contributor to this burden and where public health units are engaged in investigating and controlling identified outbreaks, they must often search for and identify cooling towers for environmental sampling and possible remediation in the absence of a comprehensive database. This is resource intensive and delays the identification of the source and remediation actions.

alPHa is therefore repeating its call on your ministry to create province-wide mandatory cooling tower registration system and mandating a risk management plan for cooling towers to operate, which would assist public health units in their response to community Legionella outbreaks.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further with you and your staff. To arrange a meeting with the leadership of our Association, please contact alPHa Executive Director Loretta Ryan by e-mail at loretta@alphaweb.org or by telephone at 647-325-9594

Sincerely,

Trudy Sachowski,
President

COPY Hon. Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health,
Hon. David Piccini, Minister of Environment Conservation and Parks
Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Dr. Michael Sherar, President and CEO, Public Health Ontario

Encl.

The Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) is a not-for-profit organization that provides leadership to the boards of health and public health units in Ontario. alPHa advises and lends expertise to members on the governance, administration and management of health units. The Association also collaborates with governments and other health organizations, advocating for a strong, effective and efficient public health system in the province. Through policy analysis, discussion, collaboration, and advocacy, alPHa's members and staff act to promote public health policies that form a strong foundation for the improvement of health promotion and protection, disease prevention and surveillance services in all of Ontario's communities.

NEWSROOM

Health unit investigating cluster of Legionnaires' disease in Orillia

Oct 07, 2022

ORILLIA – The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) is currently investigating a cluster of Legionnaires' disease cases in the Orillia area. Nineteen cases of Legionnaires' disease have been confirmed in individuals who reside in or have visited the City of Orillia in recent weeks.

Legionnaires' disease is a lung disease caused by Legionella bacteria, which is commonly found in natural freshwater environments. However, it can become a health concern in water systems, such as cooling towers, plumbing systems in large buildings, humidifiers, hot tubs and spas and decorative fountains when conditions allow the bacteria to multiply.

People can develop Legionnaires' disease when they inhale aerosolized water droplets containing the bacteria. People cannot get Legionnaires' disease by drinking water and it cannot be passed from person to person. Most people exposed to the bacteria do not become ill.

"We have had these cases reported to us very recently, indicating the need to investigate and to take steps to reduce the risk of further transmission," said Dr. Charles Gardner, medical officer of health for SMDHU. "The health unit is looking for a source of the bacteria and health care providers in the community are being notified to watch and test for potential cases."

The health unit is working with community partners, including the City of Orillia, to help raise awareness, gather information and monitor the impacts of the cluster.

Legionnaires' disease is a type of pneumonia (lung infection) caused by the bacteria. People over the age of 50, smokers, or those with certain medical conditions, including weakened immune systems, chronic lung disease or other chronic health conditions, are at increased risk for Legionnaires' disease.

Legionnaires' disease can be treated with antibiotics and most cases resolve without long term effects. Common symptoms of the disease are fever, chills, cough and difficulty breathing. Other symptoms can also develop, such as headaches, muscle pain and digestive problems (e.g., loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea).

The health unit recommends that if you have been feeling ill and have respiratory symptoms, you should follow up with your health care provider or call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 or seek immediate medical attention.

More information on Legionnaire's disease can be found on the health unit's [website](#) or by calling Health Connection at 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520, weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.



aIPHa RESOLUTION A22-3

- TITLE:** Provincial Cooling Tower Registry for the Public Health Management of Legionella Outbreaks
- SPONSOR:** Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit Board of Health
- WHEREAS** Legionella can cause fatal disease and cases of Legionellosis remain underreported in the province of Ontario;
- WHEREAS** The burden of Legionellosis is increasing and is expected to continue to increase in the context of climate change;
- WHEREAS** Most non-healthcare-associated Legionellosis deaths are attributable to spread of Legionella from cooling towers by aerosolization;
- WHEREAS** Public health units must search for and identify cooling towers for environmental sampling and possible remediation in the context of community Legionella outbreaks, which delays remediation actions and causes considerable resource expenditure by public health units;
- WHEREAS** Legionella outbreak investigation and control could be streamlined if a province-wide cooling tower registry existed, yet no such registry exists;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) write to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing recommending the creation of a province-wide mandatory cooling tower registration system and mandating a risk management plan for cooling towers to operate;

AND FURTHER that the Minister of Health, the Minister of Environment Conservation and Parks, and the Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario be copied.

CARRIED