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NEWS RELEASE

GASTON COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH INVESTIGATING LEGIONNAIRES' DISEASE CLUSTER

GASTONIA, N.C. – Gaston County Public Health is investigating a cluster of confirmed cases of Legionnaires' disease among people who lived or have spent time in Gaston County, North Carolina during the two weeks before their illness began. The environmental source of the illnesses has not yet been determined.

Legionnaires' disease is a bacterial pneumonia that people can get after breathing in aerosolized water containing *Legionella* bacteria. You cannot get Legionnaires' disease by drinking water that has *Legionella*. It is not spread from person to person.

NC DHHS and Gaston County Public Health are working to identify possible sources of the bacteria and make recommendations for preventing any additional illnesses. Investigations into Legionnaires' disease clusters can be complex. Past outbreaks have been linked to various environmental water sources such as cooling towers, building plumbing systems, hot tubs and decorative fountains. The key to preventing Legionnaires' disease is to reduce the risk of *Legionella* growth and spread in these water systems.

Legionnaires' disease can be severe, so prompt diagnosis and appropriate antibiotic treatment is important. Common symptoms include fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, headaches, muscle aches, and fatigue. Other symptoms may include weakness, loss of appetite, confusion, diarrhea, and nausea. People with symptoms or general concerns should contact their health care provider.

Most people exposed to *Legionella* bacteria do not develop Legionnaires' disease. People at increased risk of infection and severe illness include those ages 50 years and older and current or former smokers. Other risk factors include chronic health conditions such as lung, kidney, or liver disease; diabetes; cancer; and conditions and medications that affect the immune system.

Gaston County Public Health has asked health care providers to watch for any additional patients with symptoms that might indicate Legionnaires' disease. Gaston County Public Health is not recommending testing for people who may have been exposed but do not have symptoms.

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