

NHS Lothian investigate four cases of Legionella longbeachae linked to compost



NHS Lothian say that the risk to the wider public from Legionella longbeachae is low as four cases linked to gardening compost are currently being investigated.

Two patients are currently being treated in intensive care in hospital, while two others have been discharged from hospital. The age range of the victims is between 62-84.

Legionella longbeachae can be found in potting mixes, compost heaps and composted animal manures. The bacteria can remain on hands contaminated by handling potting mix for periods of up to one hour , but can be readily removed from the hands by washing. The risk of Legionella infection is not limited to gardeners, but the use of potting mixes, composts and other soils puts them at greater risk.

Symptoms of Legionella longbeachae include headaches, diarrhoea or a dry cough followed by pneumonia. Most people recover after treatment with antibiotics however those with underlying medical problems are more vulnerable.

The exact way in which Legionella longbeachae infection is passed from compost to people, is not currently known but is assumed to be through breathing in very small dust particles or very small drops of contaminated water. It is not transmitted from person to person.

Dr Richard Othieno, Consultant in Public Health and Chair of the Incident Management Team, NHS Lothian said: "This type of Legionella is quite rare in that unlike other strains it has

never been identified in man-made water systems, like cooling towers.

“We are working with experts to trace the source of the infection and samples of the compost have been sent for testing.

“We know that each of the four cases are keen gardeners and had purchased different products containing compost prior to acquiring the infection.

“Gardening is a healthy hobby but there are risks and it is important that people take some simple precautions when working in their garden or with gardening products.

“I would like to add further reassurance that the risk to the wider public is low.”

There is no link between the current cases and the outbreak of *Legionella pneumophila* in south west Edinburgh in 2012.

Below is some helpful information for anyone handling garden mixes (bagged or unbagged) such as potting mix, mulches, composts and garden soils:

Read and follow any manufacturers’ instructions on the bag, open any compost or potting mix bags carefully, if possible using a blade, wear gloves when handling compost, keep the door open in greenhouses or sheds when potting-up plants or filling hanging baskets, wear a mask if the air is dusty, particularly indoors, wash hands immediately after use of compost, if you are going to smoke while gardening, please wash your hands before doing so.

