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## **Inquiry into Three-Case Legionnaire's Disease Cluster**

*By Dave Higgins, PA News*

An investigation was underway today into a cluster of three cases of Legionnaire's Disease.

Health officials in East Yorkshire said the inquiry has been set up because it is unusual for the rare disease to occur three times in the same area in one month.

A spokesman for the Health Protection Agency (HPA) said all three patients had become ill in the Hull and East Riding area during August and were now recovering.

GPs across the region have been informed and asked to be vigilant for any possible further cases.

Staff from the HPA and the Health and Safety Executive are now working with local environmental health officers and health trusts to investigate whether the cases share a common source of infection.

The director of health protection for the Humber Health Protection Unit, Dr Autilia Newton, said: "It is quite unusual to see three cases of Legionnaires' Disease in the same area within a few weeks and so we are looking carefully to try and identify where these three patients came into contact with the Legionella bacteria and see if there are any common links between them."

She added: "The Legionella bacteria are found in environmental water, especially warm water, and humans catch the bugs by breathing in water which has been turned to droplets of aerosols."

The bacteria causes both the mild Pontiac Fever and the more serious Legionnaires Disease. Both illnesses start with flu-like symptoms, such as malaise, fever, headaches and loss of appetite.

Legionnaires' Disease is a form of pneumonia with currently around 300 cases reported annually.

All ages can be affected but it mainly affects people over 50 years of age, and generally men more than women.

Coincidentally, Legionnaires Disease was discussed today at the HPA's annual conference at Warwick University.

A HPA study has highlighted serious problems with poorly managed or maintained spa pools being a cause of the disease.

The study raises the question of whether routine Legionella testing should be included within new Health and Safety Executive and HPA guidelines.

During 2003, there were 27 cases of Legionnaires' disease in England where spa pools were identified as the source of infection, with three deaths. So far this year there has been only one case of the illness reported to be associated with a spa pool.

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