

Two infected with Legionnaire's disease

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Two cases of Legionnaires' disease have been confirmed at a paper mill in Mpumalanga, SABC television news reported on Wednesday.

The two workers at the Ngodwana Mill were receiving treatment for the disease, which can be deadly if left undiagnosed.

The Mpumalanga health department had since asked large companies, factories and shopping malls in the lowveld area to disinfect their air conditioning systems. Inspectors would monitor compliance. A Sappi company, Ngodwana has been described as one of the largest integrated pulp and paper mills of its kind in the southern hemisphere, using 6000 tons of wood a day to produce pulp, linerboard and newsprint.

Mpumalanga health department spokeswoman Carien Swart told the SABC that Legionnaires' disease was not contagious, but contracted through contact with an infected water source, including air conditioning.

According to a health website, the disease is a type of pneumonia usually caused by the legionella pneumophila bacteria and is treatable with antibiotics.

Victims can typically experience fever, chills, a cough, muscle aches and headaches between two days and two weeks after exposure.

At highest risk are the elderly, smokers, and people with chronic lung disease or weakened immune systems. - Sapa