



RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

NICK LYON
DIRECTOR

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CONTACT: Jennifer Eisner
(517) 241-2112

MDHHS releases emails related to the Genesee County Legionnaires Disease investigations

LANSING, Mich. – The mission of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services is to promote public health. Through the department’s dedication to protect residents against potential health threats, we can build a better, healthier future for families in our state.

“To be successful in this mission, we rely on strong relationships with our partners at the local level including primary care providers, community organizations, health plans, and most importantly our local health departments,” said Nick Lyon, director of MDHHS. “This is true in normal times, and it is essential during emergencies like the Flint water crisis.”

Recent comments in the media are inconsistent with the collaboration that has taken place between the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and the Genesee County Health Department. MDHHS is releasing some of its earliest email conversations between its epidemiologists and the Genesee County Health Department regarding legionella cases.

The MDHHS partnership with the Genesee County Health Department is central to providing Flint residents with the health resources they need to overcome obstacles in both the short and long terms. MDHHS and the Genesee County Health Department have worked side by side to deliver health services, exchange data and ideas, and to be there for the Flint community that is understandably worried and frustrated during this crisis.

“We know that the Legionnaires outbreaks have added to public concerns,” said Dr. Eden Wells, chief medical executive with MDHHS. “We want Flint to know we take these concerns seriously – that we have investigated these cases and committed our staff to support and guide the local investigations.”

In the fall of 2014, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services was aware of an increase in Legionnaires’ disease cases in Genesee County and it was determined that additional support from the state was needed. The state stepped in to offer that support. Within a month, state epidemiologists were actively conducting interviews with cases and medical record reviews to make sure that Flint residents had the joint resources of local and state experts.

MDHHS and GCHD worked together on the initial public health response which centers around outreach to the healthcare community to promote testing of suspect cases. MDHHS offered communications resources to develop public messages, created a healthcare provider message for the Genesee County Health Department, and laid out distribution guidance.

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MDHHS shared this information with federal partners at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to ensure that the steps taken were the appropriate measures to protect the health of residents in Flint.

Today, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services is engaged with environmental health officials on the local and national levels to proactively address the potential for future Legionnaires disease cases.

While there have been no additional cases of Legionnaires Disease in months locally, MDHHS is currently working with experts and providers to prevent future outbreaks. MDHHS continues to distribute water filters, develop and share educational materials, provide behavioral health services, fund nurse case managers, provide fresh foods and expand the Pathways to Potential program in Flint.

Director Lyon added, “When it comes to health, our team and the partners we turn to for support have not lost sight of our mission: protect the health of our residents by bridging the gaps to promote more and better opportunities for success in Flint.”

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