Date: July 3, 2018

To: Wisconsin Healthcare Providers, Infection Preventionists, Local and Tribal Health Departments, and Laboratorians

From: Jim Vergeront, M.D.
Acting Chief Medical Officer and State Epidemiologist for Communicable Diseases

Increased reports of laboratory-confirmed cases of legionellosis (Legionnaires’ disease)

PLEASE DISTRIBUTE WIDELY

With the arrival of warm weather, an increase in reported laboratory-confirmed cases of Legionnaires’ disease has been detected among Wisconsin residents. Since June 1, the Wisconsin Division of Public Health (DPH) has received reports of 49 confirmed cases of Legionnaires’ disease. Case-patients’ ages range from 36 to 89 years, and the median age is 61 years.

We request your assistance with detecting and reporting cases of Legionnaires’ disease to help determine possible sources of exposure to Legionella.

For Health Care Providers
We are requesting that patients who meet any of the following criteria be tested for Legionnaires’ disease:

- Hospitalized patients with atypical pneumonia consistent with Legionnaires’ disease ([https://www.cdc.gov/legionella/clinicians.html](https://www.cdc.gov/legionella/clinicians.html)).
- Immunocompromised patients with pneumonia.
- Patients with pneumonia who fail to respond to treatment with a β-lactam or cephalosporin antibiotic.
- Patients at risk for Legionnaires’ disease with healthcare-associated pneumonia (pneumonia with onset ≥ 48 hours after admission).
- Patients with pneumonia who have a travel history (i.e., patients who have traveled away from their home within 14 days before illness onset).

The urinary antigen assay and culture of lower respiratory secretions on selective media (Buffered Charcoal Yeast Extract [BYCE] agar) are the preferred diagnostic tests for Legionnaires’ disease. **We strongly encourage clinicians to order both Legionella cultures and urinary antigen tests for any patients suspected to have Legionnaires’ disease.** Characterization of clinical isolates of Legionella is essential to determine linkages among clinical cases and with environmental sources.

Please note that Legionella will not grow on standard media used for routine respiratory cultures. Thus, Legionella culture must be specifically ordered for a lower respiratory specimen (e.g., sputum or bronchoalveolar lavage).

If your laboratory does not perform Legionella culture, specimens should immediately be sent to the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene (WSLH) for testing. In addition, during this time of enhanced Legionnaires’ disease surveillance, the DPH will approve fee-exempt testing for Legionella (PCR and culture of lower respiratory
specimens, pleural fluid, lung tissue or other normally sterile site) at the WSLH for patients meeting the criteria above who have radiographic evidence of pneumonia. To obtain approval for fee-exempt *Legionella* testing, please contact the DPH Bureau of Communicable Diseases at 608-267-9003.

**For Local and Tribal Health Departments**
Investigations of clusters of Legionnaires’ disease depend on aggressive follow-up of the case-patients’ history and possible exposures to *Legionella*. The case-patient or a member of his/her family should be interviewed to determine possible sources of his/her illness as soon as possible following diagnosis.

Please use the expanded [legionellosis hypothesis-generating questionnaire](#) for all interviews. After the patient interview, please enter data into the Wisconsin Electronic Disease Surveillance System (WEDSS), complete all exposure fields, and upload a scanned copy of the supplemental questionnaire with additional exposure information into the WEDSS Filing Cabinet.

**For Laboratorians**
For patients with radiographic evidence of pneumonia and a positive urinary *Legionella* antigen test result, please send remaining aliquots of sputum or other lower respiratory specimens to the WSLH for *Legionella* PCR and culture as part of our enhanced surveillance efforts.

To obtain approval for fee-exempt testing of these specimens, please contact the DPH Bureau of Communicable Diseases at 608-267-9003.

Specimens should be shipped to:

Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene  
2601 Agriculture Drive  
Madison, WI 53718  
ATTN: Bacteriology

If you have questions regarding specimen kits and shipping, please contact the WSLH Customer Service at 800-862-1013.

Thank you for your assistance in this important matter.

**If you have any questions, please contact Anna Kocharian, Communicable Diseases Epidemiologist (608-267-9004 or anna.kocharian@wi.gov) or the DPH Bureau of Communicable Diseases at 608-267-9003.**