

Thelen, Mary Beth (DEQ)

From: Wurfel, Brad (DEQ)
Sent: Friday, March 13, 2015 6:49 PM
To: Hollins, Harvey (GOV)
Cc: Wyant, Dan (DEQ)
Subject: Part II
Attachments: FOIA Request Flint Water.doc

Importance: High

OK D-

This is the second issue I mentioned earlier today.

In December, our staff became peripherally aware that the hospitals in Genesee were seeing an uptick in Legionnaires cases.

Legionnaires is a water-borne illness. It essentially is a type of pneumonia caused by a bacteria. It is treated with antibiotics. Untreated, it can be deadly. It most often manifests in nursing homes and assisted living facilities, because the transmission is through water vapor getting into lungs – via air conditioners, vaporizers or low-flow shower heads that produce a lot of misting. You can drink water with this bacteria in it and not get sick – it has to enter the lungs in vapor.

I don't have any details on the cases, but here is what I understand to this point:

- More than 40 cases reported since last April. That's a significant uptick – more than all the cases in the last five years or more combined.
- April / May is usually the start of Legionnaires season – it proliferates in warmer months – but April also is the point at which the city switched to the Flint River as a source.
- County Health Departments are supposed to perform epidemiological tracebacks on all confirmed cases of this disease, to locate the source and address it. Genesee County Health had not done this work as of November. At a January meeting with area hospitals, MDCH, DEQ and others, Nick Lyon reportedly directed the county health folks, in terms not uncertain, to get this done as a priority. As I'm sitting here today, it still is not done to my knowledge.
- My counterparts at MDCH informed me today that they cannot step in unless they are invited or unless the outbreak is multi-county. They've not been invited until, I believe, today. That may be in part because of the email string and letter I've enclosed here, which was unknown to MDCH until I shared it over to them.

The email thread below is best read bottom-to-top, and read prior to reading the enclosed FOIA to the city.

Essentially, Jim Henry with Genesee County Health is putting up the flare. He's made the leap formally in his email that the uptick in cases is directly attributable to the river as a drinking water source – this is beyond irresponsible, given that is his department that has failed to do the necessary traceback work to provide any conclusive evidence of where the outbreak is sourced, and it also flies in the face of the very thing a drinking water system is designed to do.

DEQ did not receive this FOIA, which appears designed to buttress his position in the email -- that sections of the water delivery system may be harboring this bacteria. We think it would be highly unlikely that anything would be found around the plant, where the water is treated. Most often, this bacteria forms at the building / residential point in the system. Legionnaires is NOT among the 90 water contaminants screened in the Safe Drinking Water Act, but in the absence of action by county health, our staff are now considering taking samples from various points in the system and working with DCH's lab to test for it, if for no other reason than to rule it out.

Regardless, the accusation is serious and the nature of the communication leaves me thinking we would be advantaged to bring together all the agencies asap to share what information we have and develop a response / screening strategy before the weather gets warm again.

I realize these are long emails. Thanks for your patience.

b

Brad Wurfel
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517-284-6713

PPI cell

From: Shekter Smith, Liane (DEQ)
Sent: Thursday, March 12, 2015 8:41 AM
To: Wurfel, Brad (DEQ); Sygo, Jim (DEQ); Howes, Sarah (DEQ)
Cc: Shaler, Karen (DEQ); Benzie, Richard (DEQ); Devereaux, Tracy Jo (DEQ); Busch, Stephen (DEQ)
Subject: FW: Information Request and Documentation
Importance: High

The district received this late Tuesday.

Steve Busch has indicated that the district has not received a meeting request from Jim Henry or the Genesee County Health Department as indicated in his email below.

The FOIA is specifically directed to the City of Flint not the DEQ.

While the change in source may have created water quality conditions that could provide additional organic nutrient source to support legionella growth, there is no evidence or confirmation of legionella coming directly from the Water Treatment Plant or in the community water supply distribution system at this time.

Seems like the next step is to communicate with DCH and possibly develop a joint strategy/response. Not sure who in Exec wants to take the lead on this. Steve Busch and Mike Prysby will continue to be lead for us on this. They have been in contact with DCH recently but only to learn that little progress has been made in identifying a source or sources for the illnesses.