



CICELY HARRIS
Chairperson

SHATIC MITCHELL
District Manager

CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD 10
215 West 125th Street, 4th Floor
New York, NY 10027
T: 212-749-3105 F: 212-662-4215

October 6, 2021

Dave A. Chokshi, MD MSc.
Commissioner
NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
530 1st Avenue
New York, NY 10016

Dear Commissioner Chokshi,

I write today as Chair of Manhattan Community Board 10's Health & Human Services Committee to request a full and thorough report on the NYC Department of Health's and NYC Health + Hospitals/ Harlem handling of the Legionnaires' cluster investigation in Central Harlem.

Our community board received notice on August, 18th 2021 regarding the Health Department's investigation of a community cluster of (9) cases of Legionnaires' disease in Central Harlem zip codes 10037, 10039 and bordering communities with (9) people diagnosed since August 9th 2021. We were advised that the health department actively, investigated these cases by sampling and testing water from all cooling tower systems in the area of the cluster.

On August 19th 2021, our District Manager attended a virtual community meeting hosted by the Department of Health. On August 20th 2021 our District Manager followed up via email with a representative from the Department of Health to request the distribution of informational flyers on the Legionnaires' disease throughout the affected neighborhoods.

On August 27th 2021, a representative from the Health Department provided the following update: *"The number of total cases of Legionnaires Disease in the community cluster has risen from 12 to 16. We are continuing with ongoing investigations and are working with building owners to ensure remediation."*

On September 15th 2021, our District Manager requested an update and was advised by a Department of Health representative on September 16th 2021 that there were no new updates.

According to the Department of Health press release on September 22, 2021 *"The Health Department announced that the investigation of the Central Harlem Legionnaires' disease community cluster concluded as no new cases of Legionnaires' disease had been identified in the*

area for four weeks and the cooling towers in the affected areas have completed disinfection as directed by the Health Department. In total, there were 18 cases of Legionnaires' disease associated with this cluster. All 18 people were hospitalized and 16 have been discharged. There have been no deaths."

In 2015 in the South Bronx, at least (7) people died and (79) more were sickened in a 3-week span due to Legionnaires' disease. The death toll topped a 2006 outbreak, also in the Bronx, where (6) people died in Parkchester. These deaths could have been averted if precautionary measures were implemented. Since that time, New York City Local Law 77 of 2015 now requires that the Department of Health specifies the testing of cooling towers "**every three months or 90 days**" and to "**register all existing cooling towers**". These local laws were instituted only *after* many had become sick and deaths were reported. Our community cannot afford to lose any more lives to a disease that is preventable and treatable, and due to negligence can become a major health risk to many.

In 2015, both New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz had this to say: "Legionnaires' has been a persistent health problem for years and for far too long, the risk of Legionnaires' was underestimated," Bill de Blasio.

Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. noted "it took seven dead bodies for officials to address a problem that has grown steadily since 2002 — and most often affects the city's poorest residents." "It is the responsibility of government to protect the health and well-being of the public." Diaz said.

Manhattan Community Board 10's Health & Human Services Committee recommends that instead of testing cooling towers every (3) months, that **cooling towers are tested monthly**. Instead of requiring cleaning (2) times per year **we recommend cooling towers are cleaned (4) times per year**. **We also recommend all cooling towers are equipped with a Legionnaires' filtration system that can prevent bacteria from escaping into the atmosphere.**

Manhattan Community Board 10's Health and Human Services committee believes that appropriate inspection mechanisms could save lives, and while we do applaud the efforts that the Department of Health has made up until this point we know there is so much more than can be done to ensure the health and safety of our most vulnerable New Yorkers. This is the reason why we are requesting a full and thorough report detailing the ways the Legionnaires Outbreak was handled by the Department of Health and NYC Health +Hospitals/Harlem. If you have any further questions you may contact to our District Manager, Shatic Mitchell at (917) 675- 0946 or via email smitchell@cb.nyc.gov

Sincerely,



Dr. Hazel Dukes
Chairwoman
Manhattan Community Board 10
Health & Human Services Committee



Cicely Harris
Chairwoman
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