

8/8/02

**Progress of Legionnaire’s Disease outbreak Barrow-in-Furness**

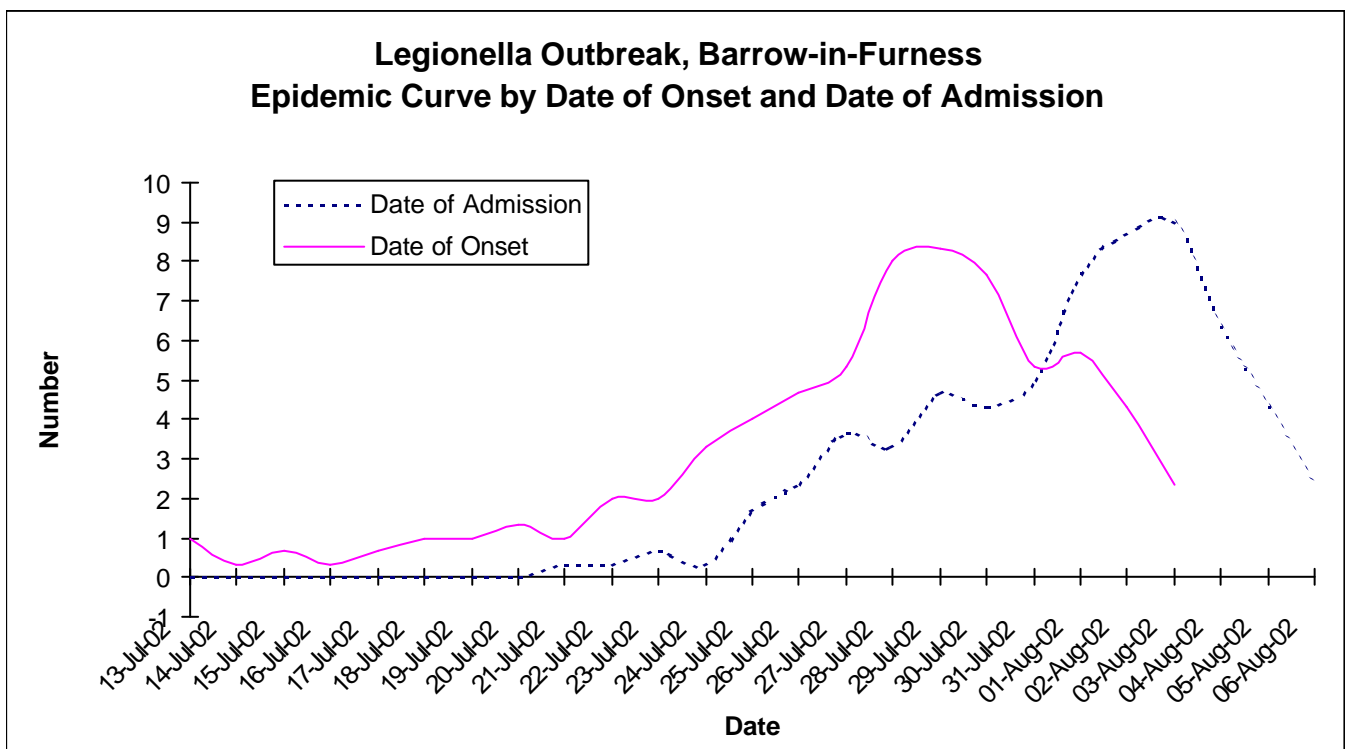
All General Practitioners in Morecambe Bay  
All Pharmacists in Morecambe Bay

Dear colleague,

I should like to take the opportunity to update you on a number of issues concerning the ongoing outbreak of Legionnaire’s Disease in Barrow-in-Furness.

***What is happening to the outbreak***

We have early epidemiological evidence that the outbreak appears to be coming to an end. The outbreak curves below are plotted by date of onset of symptoms and date of admission information below is based upon provisional data obtained from 75 patients with unequivocal diagnoses of Legionnaire’s disease as at 8/8/02.



The height of the epidemic as judged from data concerning the onset of symptoms appears now to have passed on, or around, the 29<sup>th</sup> July. However, because of the lead time between patients becoming ill and seeking treatment, the peak of presentation of patients at Furness General Hospital (and your surgeries) did not occur until the 3<sup>rd</sup> August.

Provided that we have taken proper control of the source of the outbreak, this decline should continue.

### ***What action we have taken to control the source of the outbreak***

Epidemiological investigations and environmental microbiological have placed a high degree of suspicion around the air conditioning plant operated at Forum 28 in Barrow-in-Furness.

We have excluded all other potentially hazardous equipment in Barrow-in-Furness known to the local environmental health department and the Health & Safety Executive from our investigations, following a programme of visits, inspections and microbiological sampling. We have also required all industries operating potentially hazardous equipment in the Barrow-in-Furness area to disinfect and clean such equipment as an additional precaution.

The suspect plant at Forum 28 remains prohibited from use by order of the Health & Safety Executive. The HSE and ourselves have also supervised the disinfection of the air conditioning plant at Forum 28.

We do not believe that there is any residual source of hazard to people using the town centre or Forum 28, the control of which has been handed back to the council.

### ***Should you still continue to treat and test patients on suspicion of Legionnaire's disease?***

Cases of Legionnaire's disease may still continue to occur, although less frequently for a further 10 days. You should still treat and test patients as previously advised, and maintain a high level of suspicion.

We will notify you when we believe that it is no longer appropriate to manage patients in this way.

Please do not send urinary antigen tests purely to reassure asymptomatic patients. There are a limit to the number of antigen kits available to us in the country, and the microbiological department of Furness General is having difficulty in speedily processing the numbers of requests currently being received.

### ***Antibiotic treatment issues.***

We advised in an earlier note that patients being treated in the community should receive initial therapy with either erythromycin or clarithromycin. Unsurprisingly this therapy is resulting in problems for some patients, mainly due to gastro-intestinal upset. Patients with such symptoms should not be advised to discontinue treatment or continue on a reduced dose. The correct management is to switch the patient from either the erythromycin or clarithromycin to ciprofloxacin. If ciprofloxacin is contraindicated please contact a microbiologist or consultant physician at your local hospital for advice.

### ***Hospital implications***

Furness General Hospital closed to all outpatient and elective inpatient work and staff were diverted to care for the Legionella cases. Westmorland General Hospital and the Royal Lancaster Infirmary closed to elective inpatient work. Nineteen patients were cared for in several intensive care units across the North West. As the outbreak subsides full activity will be reinstated, probably over the course of next week.

### ***Follow-up***

Patients managed entirely in the community require no further medical follow-up.

Patients managed in hospital will all be recalled for follow-on serological confirmation of disease at which time any necessary clinical re-examinations will also take place.

### ***And finally...***

Thank you.

Further updates and information are available on [www.healthprotection.org.uk](http://www.healthprotection.org.uk)

Yours etc..