

Orillia has shut down Rotary Place cooling tower

Recent test results indicate higher levels of legionella; health unit advises public is safe at Rotary

For immediate release (Oct. 25, 2019) – As recommended by the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU), the City of Orillia has shut down the cooling tower at Rotary Place as test results received on Thursday, Oct. 24 indicate higher than normal levels of the legionella bacteria in the tower.

The health unit advises that during the shutdown and cleaning of the tower, the public is safe at or around Rotary Place.

“At this time it is safe for people to attend events and programs at Rotary Place while the building’s water cooling system is being cleaned and disinfected,” said Dr. Charles Gardner, SMDHU Medical Officer of Health.

The cooling tower at Rotary Place is being shut down for further cleaning and disinfecting and the SMDHU will conduct another test on Sunday, Oct. 27. At this time, it is unknown if the strain of legionella bacteria found at Rotary Place matches the strain associated with the confirmed cases of Legionnaire’s disease in Orillia.

“We have been working closely with the health unit since the Legionnaire’s disease cluster was identified in Orillia. I want to reiterate the health unit’s message that it is safe for people to continue to use Rotary Place as we carry out further cleaning and disinfecting of the cooling tower,” said Mayor Steve Clarke.

The cooling tower at Rotary Place is part of the refrigeration system required to keep the ice surface in good condition. Although it is safe to use the building, in order to maintain the ice we are lowering the temperature of the building, therefore all programming will be cancelled for the weekend. Any further program impacts will be communicated if required.

All municipally-owned cooling towers were proactively disinfected as of Tuesday, Oct. 22 while the City awaited the results of samples retrieved as part of the SMDHU Legionnaires’ disease investigation. The City of Orillia also has a routine maintenance program for its cooling towers.

According to the health unit, nine cases of Legionnaires’ disease have been confirmed in the cluster. The source of the legionella bacteria responsible for the cluster of illnesses has not been identified. The health unit advises that most people exposed to the bacteria do not become ill; however, anyone who has a headache, muscle aches, fever, cough, or difficulty breathing should seek medical attention.

The health unit’s website states that Legionella bacteria is commonly found in natural freshwater environments; however it can become a health concern in water systems, such as cooling towers. People can develop Legionnaires’ disease when they inhale aerosolized water droplets containing the bacteria. However, most people exposed to the bacteria do not become ill. People

cannot get Legionnaires' disease by drinking water and it cannot be passed from person to person.

For more information please visit the SMDHU [website page](#). All questions and concerns about the investigation can be directed to the health unit at 705-721-7520.

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