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## Reported Cases of Legionnaires' Increase

Associated Press  
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DOVER, Del. -- The number of reported cases of Legionnaires' disease has risen sharply this year -- 624 as of last week, up from 436 for the same period last year -- baffling federal and state health officials.

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"There don't seem to be any explanations yet," said Brendan Flannery, an epidemic intelligence officer with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

The 197 cases reported in the CDC's South Atlantic region, which includes Maryland and Virginia, were more than double last year's 95 cases.

"We're just trying to figure out what's going on, but nobody has any really good ideas," said Diane Woolard, director of surveillance and investigations for the Virginia Department of Health.

Among the questions officials are trying to answer is whether the apparent increase in the prevalence of the disease is real, whether there might be problems with the urine antigen test used to diagnose most cases, or whether reporting simply has improved.

People contract Legionnaires' disease after inhaling mists from a water source contaminated with the legionella bacteria, which thrive in warm, stagnant water. Sources can include hot water tanks, cooling towers and the evaporative condensers of large air-conditioning systems, whirlpool spas and showers.

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