MEDIA STATEMENT

19 January 2011

LEGIONNAIRES' DISEASE ALERT TO TRAVELLERS FROM BALI

Australia's Chief Medical Officer, Professor Jim Bishop, has issued an alert to travellers in Bali or who have recently returned, who experience ‘flu-like’ symptoms such as fever and cough to consult their GPs or hospital emergency departments.

"It is important that patients advise their doctor or hospital of their recent travel to Bali," Professor Bishop said.

"Over recent months, Australian health authorities have been made aware of 11 cases of Legionnaires' disease detected in Victorian and Western Australian residents returning from holidays in the Kuta area of Bali between August 2010 and January 2011.

Professor Bishop said Indonesian health authorities and the World Health Organization (WHO) are aware of the problem and are investigating. They have taken water samples from possible sources of outbreak for testing and have advised on appropriate disinfection and cleaning of water supply systems at the hotel and buildings in the vicinity. A number of those who contracted the disease stayed in the same hotel in Kuta (The Ramayana Resort and Spa) and most had visited the same local shopping centre.

The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing is working with State and Territory health departments to ensure that health professionals are alert to the potential risk of contracting the disease from travel to Bali.

"There are specific antibiotics available to treat the disease. The time between a person's exposure to the bacteria and becoming sick is usually between two to 10 days," Professor Bishop said.

"People most at risk of Legionnaires' disease are those over 50 years of age, smokers, and anyone whose immune system is suppressed by medication or
diseases such as cancer, kidney failure or diabetes. These people may experience more severe disease."

**Facts about legionnaires’ disease**

Legionnaires' disease may cause fever, chills, a cough and shortness of breath. Some people also have muscle aches, headache, tiredness, loss of appetite and diarrhoea. Legionnaires' disease is not spread from person to person.

The legionella bacteria occurs naturally in the environment, mainly in water and soil. It is normally in very low concentrations but can increase markedly, particularly in man-made aquatic environments with warm recirculating water, such as air conditioning cooling towers.

Legionnaires' Disease is acquired through breathing in very fine droplets of water which contain the bacteria, such as spray drifts which are vented from cooling towers. Whirlpool spas and warm water systems can also lead to the illness.

Further advice for travellers is available on the Smart Traveller website.

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