Q. What is Legionnaires’ Disease?
A. Legionnaires’ disease is a common name for one of the several illnesses caused by Legionella bacteria. Legionnaires’ disease is an infection of the lungs, a form of pneumonia, caused by inhaling or aspirating water mist contaminated with Legionella.

Legionella bacteria are widely present at low levels in the environment: in lakes, streams, and ponds. At low levels the chance of getting Legionnaires’ disease from a water source is very slight. The problem arises when high concentrations of the organism grow in water sources. Water heaters, cooling towers, and warm, stagnant water can provide ideal conditions for the growth of the organism.

The Legionella bacteria was first discovered in 1976.

Q. Is Legionnaires’ disease spread from person to person?
A. No. Legionnaires’ disease is not contagious and cannot be transmitted from one person to another.

Q. How common is Legionnaires’ disease?
A. It is estimated that in the United States there are between 10,000 and 50,000 cases each year.

Q. How does a person get Legionnaires’ disease?
A. A person must be exposed to water contaminated with Legionella bacteria. This exposure may happen by inhaling or drinking water contaminated with the Legionella bacteria. For example, inhaling contaminated water mist from a cooling tower, a humidifier, or even a shower or sink can cause the disease.

Q. Does everyone who inhales Legionella into the lungs develop Legionnaires’ disease?
A. No. Most people have resistance to the disease. It is thought that fewer than 5 out of 100 persons exposed to water contaminated with Legionella will develop Legionnaires’ disease.

Q. How were the affected COC employees identified?
A. They experienced flu-like symptoms and ultimately went to see their medical providers. They have self-reported medical findings to the college. In addition, Legionnaires’ Disease is a “reportable” illness under Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines. Individual doctors are required to report confirmed cases of the disease to the CDC.
Q. Do we know for a fact that the employees were exposed to the bacteria on the COC campus?
A. No we don’t. But we can’t rule it out either. That is why we have hired the outside firm to do extensive testing and investigation.

Q. What do I do if I feel sick?
A. On a campus with a faculty, staff and student population exceeding 25,000, there are continually reports of upper respiratory ailments. Many are simply colds and flu.

*Early symptoms of the illness are much like the flu. After a short time (in some cases a day or two), more severe pneumonia-like symptoms may appear. Not all individuals with Legionnaires’ disease experience the same symptoms. Some may have only flu-like symptoms, but to others the disease can be serious and even fatal.*

*Early flu-like symptoms:*
  - slight fever
  - headache
  - aching joints and muscles
  - lack of energy, tired feeling
  - loss of appetite

*Common pneumonia-like symptoms:*
  - high fever (102° to 105°F, or 39° to 41°C)
  - cough (dry at first, later producing phlegm)
  - difficulty in breathing or shortness of breath
  - chills
  - chest pains

If a student has a suspicion that he/she might have the disease, we encourage them to seek medical attention and suggest blood testing for the bacteria from their care provider. If Legionnaires’ Disease is confirmed, they should immediately report it to the college’s Student Health Center.

Q. Where do the affected people work?
A. Both individuals work on the third floor of Seco Canyon Hall where there are only offices. Seco Canyon Hall is a large building housing faculty offices, some student services offices, the college’s MIS offices and a few classrooms. It is a 23,526-square-foot building constructed in 1975.
Q. When were these cases confirmed?
A. The first person with a confirmed case reported test results to the Human Resources office on March 27, 2010. The second possible case was reported April 26, 2010 and has not been confirmed.

Q. What actions did the college take after the initial case was reported?
A. • Legionnaires’ Disease can be contracted from almost anywhere and there was no indication that the college was the “source” of the bacteria.
• However, the college contracted Forensic Analytical Consulting Services to conduct a Level-One Legionella risk assessment of the most likely areas where bacteria could be.
• The company was contacted on March 29 and testing occurred on March 30, 2010. The assessment consisted of testing all water systems within Seco Canyon Hall’s third floor kitchen, and adjacent spaces including plumbing and HVAC systems, and other water reservoirs.
• Preliminary results were provided on April 7 and the tested areas fell into the “low risk” category.
• Final results were received on April 13. Nine out of ten water samples had no detected colonies of legionella bacteria. One sample from an exterior hose bib on the second floor had detectable bacteria but at a level considered “normal” for such areas (4 CFU/ml). It was also a strain of legionella not normally associated with legionnaires’ disease.

Q. What are the specific circumstances of the second possible case?
A. A second individual who had been experiencing flu-like symptoms reported blood-work results to Human resources on April 26. Those results confirmed exposure to Legionella bacteria by the individual, but were not sufficient to confirm an actual case of the disease. More testing is being done.

Q. Specifically, what is the college doing?
A. First and foremost, the college is taking this situation very seriously. The health and welfare of our faculty, staff, students and visitors is our most important concern. If there is a source of Legionella bacterial in the building, we will do our very best to find it. We are following the guidelines outlined in the federal OSHA Technical Manual - Section III: Chapter VII: Legionnaires’ Disease. With one confirmed case and one possible additional case, we are moving to the next level of investigation. We have asked Forensic Analytical Consulting Services to return and conduct a more thorough investigation - a Level-Two Investigation under the OSHA standards. A Level-Two investigation requires a more thorough investigation of the site, additional testing and more in-depth assessment of potential additional cases.

Specifically:
1. A medical assessment of all employees currently on sick leave will take place to identify any new cases.
2. An awareness training program for faculty, staff and students will be conducted to minimize employee concerns and aid in early recognition of new cases.
3. Additional collection and testing of water and other samples will take place.
4. Additional assessment and testing of HVAC and air circulation systems will occur.
5. The area of testing will expand to the building’s roof to assess potential leaks that could lead to “standing water” locations.
6. Since the two individuals are located on the third floor of Seco Canyon Hall, all offices on that floor will be relocated until the situation is resolved. Currently, 35 people have offices on that floor.
7. The third floor of Seco will be “closed” to all individuals until the investigation is complete and any required mitigation steps are completed.
8. We will respond aggressively and appropriately to changes in the situation.

Q. What does an awareness program entail?
A. The program is designed to inform everyone on campus about the potential health issue and educate them about the specifics of the disease. It will likely consist of frequent communications and informational materials with basic information about the disease and actions being taken to deal with the situation. The more everyone understands the symptoms and realities of the disease, the better the college will be able to act quickly and effectively.

Q. If I have a class or have been in Seco Hall recently, should I go get tested?
A. You should only get tested if you are experiencing the symptoms associated with Legionnaires’ disease.

Q. Can I die from Legionnaires disease?
A. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the fatality rate is similar to other forms of pneumonia, approximately 15 percent. The most susceptible to the disease are those who are elderly, smokers, and are immunosuppressed. Individuals who have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), organ transplant patients, and persons taking corticosteroid therapy are also at elevated risk of contracting Legionnaires’ disease.

Q. Why have my classes not been moved out of the Seco building?
A. At this time, we have no reason to believe that floors 1 & 2 of Seco Canyon Hall or any other student or employee area on campus are of concern.
Q. Am I being put at risk by continuing to attend classes in Seco Hall, visiting the Financial Aid Office & Career Services, etc.?
A. At this time, we have no reason to believe that floors 1 & 2 of Seco Canyon Hall or any other student or employee area on campus are of concern.

Q. I have flu symptoms but haven’t been in Seco Hall. Could other buildings be affected?
A. Legionella bacteria are widely present at low levels in the environment. While it is statistically “possible” to have more than one location with concentrations of the bacteria serious enough to cause illness it isn’t very “probable.”

Q. Do I have a right to not attend class if I feel my health is at risk?
A. Yes.

Q. If you’ve known about this since March, why am I just now hearing about it?
A. The college took immediate responsive action to investigate whether there was a source of the bacteria in Seco Hall according to OSHA guidelines. Testing for a definitive source of the bacteria is necessary, because it is possible that the person with confirmed Legionnaires’s disease contracted it somewhere else. It would not be appropriate to take actions not warranted by established facts. On the side of caution, however, the college decided to advise faculty, staff, students and the public about what it is doing while in search of those “facts.”

Q. I had to drop a class for flu-like symptoms after the drop deadline. If I’m tested and they find out I’ve been exposed to Legionnaires can I get a refund and a W for the class?
A. It is best to contact the admissions office directly with your individual circumstances for a determination of your options.

Q. If I am afraid to go to class because I might be exposed to Legionella bacteria, will it affect my grade?
A. There are no classroom areas at this time where Legionella bacteria have been found or are suspected. If a class is held, you would be expected to attend.

Q. What is the college doing to clean the area and prevent future contamination?
A. 1. If a source of Legionella bacteria is found, we will follow the recommendations of authorities on what methods and materials to use to clean the area and remove the contamination.

2. Now and into the future, the college will be more aware of the conditions that promote the presence and growth of the Legionella bacteria and respond accordingly when those conditions are identified. Legionella bacteria are widely distributed in water systems and are not eradicated by the chlorination used to purify domestic water systems. Low and even non-detectable levels of the organism can
colonize a water source and grow to high concentrations under the right conditions. Water conditions that tend to promote the growth of Legionella include:

- stagnation
- temperatures between 68 and 122 degrees Fahrenheit
- pH between 5.0 and 8.5
- sediment that tends to promote growth of the microflora
- the presence of micro-organisms that supply essential nutrients for growth of Legionella or harbor the organism

Q. What are the names of the individuals who contracted Legionnaires’ Disease?
A. Medical information is a privacy issue and the college will not disclose the names of those involved.

Q. Where can I get more information about Legionnaires’ disease?
A. You can find valuable information at: the OSHA Website (www.osha.gov) and the CDC Website (www.cdc.gov/legionella/index.htm).