Columbus Air Test Finds Tularemia-Causing Bacteria

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COLUMBUS, Ohio — Health officials were assessing the results of air sampling that detected the presence of a potentially dangerous bacteria this week, 10TV News reported on Thursday.

The genetic bacterium that causes Tularemia was picked up in an air sample at a test site in Columbus, prompting authorities to notify the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention and the FBI, according to Columbus Public Health.

Tularemia, in very large quantities, could be used as a biological weapon. However, health officials said there was no immediate risk to the public.

"We could call this an environmental detection," said Columbus Public Health Commissioner Dr. Teresa Long. "We know it was one out of multiple samples and we feel we've taken prudent action to understand it and don't consider this a threat to human health."

Health officials said the bacterium was detected by a new, more sensitive process that was implemented on Thursday.

Tularemia bacterium does occur naturally in the environment in Ohio, health officials said. The last human case in Franklin County was in 2009 and was the result of a tick bite.

No animal or human cases have been reported in central Ohio since.

Symptoms of Tularemia usually appear within 3-5 days after infection, and may include sudden fever, chills, headache, diarrhea, muscle aches, joint pain, dry cough and weakness.

Tularemia is not spread from person to person and can be treated with medication.

About 200 cases of Tularemia are diagnosed in the United States each year, health officials said.

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