

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Health officials were optimistic today that the worst may be over in the explosive outbreak of "legionnaire's disease." The source remains a mystery, but there have been no new cases in two days.

Swine flu and other influenza viruses have been all but ruled out as medical researchers continued round-the-clock efforts to identify the cause of the illness that has killed 23 persons.

Two persons who exhibited symptoms of the disease — fever, chills and lung congestion — died Thursday in southwestern Pennsylvania, but state health officials have not yet officially listed them as victims of the disease. As in all confirmed cases, however, they had some connection with a state American Legion convention in Philadelphia two weeks ago.

Efforts to identify the source of the disease now focuses on an unidentified virus still being sought in the laboratories and a possible toxin that may have infected the victims while in Philadelphia.

New information on a possible viral source was expected when new tests are completed today at state Health Department laboratories in Philadelphia and at the U.S. Center for Disease Control in Atlanta.

Meanwhile, teams of medical detectives fanned out today to check the six hotels and scores of restaurants where those attending the convention stayed and ate. They were checking air conditioning systems, water sources, food and even carpets and wallpaper, looking for a toxin — a poisonous substance — that may have triggered the outbreak.

No new cases of the disease have been reported since Tuesday, state Health Secretary Leonard Bachman

reported Thursday. He said that some of the 138 persons hospitalized in the outbreak have been allowed to return home.

There was still no evidence of contagious spread of the disease, he ad-

ded, and evidence points to a slackening off.

"We believe the reporting system is good and we are optimistic," said Bachman, standing before a chart detailing the preplexing strength with which the disease broke forth.

The legionnaires opened their convention in Philadelphia July 21 and adjourned July 24. The following Monday, more than a score of people who attended or had some contact with the convention were ill.

One man who exhibited the disease symptoms died Tuesday, July 27, according to Bachman's chart. Three days later, last Friday, four deaths were recorded. There was one death

last Saturday.

Then came the peak: six deaths last Sunday and nine, the highest number for single day, on Monday. More than 100 people were hospitalized by that time. New cases were being confirmed, but all traced back to the convention. No deaths related to the disease were reported Tuesday, but two persons who had been ill for several days died Wednesday.

"There is a possibility that we will never find the answer," said Bachman, speaking of the cause for the outbreak. He promised to continue the investigation "for a year or two years if it is needed to get to the bottom of it"