

WBALTV.com

Legionella Bacteria Found At City Hospital

Related To Story

Bacteria Found In Water System; No Patients Affected

POSTED: 4:09 pm EST January 6, 2009

UPDATED: 6:31 pm EST January 6, 2009



BALTIMORE -- Officials at Maryland General Hospital in Baltimore said they discovered low levels of deadly Legionella bacteria Monday following a routine test of the building's water system.

[David Collins Reports](#)

So far, no patients or hospital staff have been infected, WBAL TV 11 News reporter David Collins said.

On Monday, hospital officials discovered it in a shower area during a routine test of the building's water system. Doctors said they're taking precautions to make sure patients don't contract it.

"What we are doing is advising our patients to drink bottled water and we are decreasing access to showers," said Dr. Chankralekha Banerjee.

According to 11 News archives, the bacteria has turned up at least twice at MGH in the last 22 months.

Legionella bacteria is common and is found naturally in the environment. It grows best in hot water, doctors said. People get Legionnaire's disease when they breathe in a mist or vapor that has been contaminated.

The symptoms are similar to pneumonia, and while it can be treated successfully with antibiotics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported it can be fatal in up to 5 to 30 percent of the cases. As many as 18,000 people suffer from the disease every year.

"There are no documented cases in the hospital," Banerjee said of the current outbreak.

MGH took immediate steps to disinfect its water system, hospital officials said.

"What we do is something called hydrochlorinate the water. We increase the levels of chlorine in the water and we do flushing of the water, and usually with those two steps we clear the water quite quickly," Banerjee said.

A 2007 study by the University of Pittsburgh Schools of Health Sciences found that 70 percent of hospital water systems sampled tested positive for Legionella bacteria and 43 percent of the hospitals had a high level of bacteria colonization.

Yet there are no state or federal requirements that hospitals test their water systems. According to CDC Dr. Laura Hicks, hospitals that do test often send the sample to unregulated laboratories.

Hicks said Legionella bacteria is hard to get rid of and turns up more in the Northeast than anywhere else in the U.S.

Copyright 2009 by wbaltv.com. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.