

## Union Memorial says reporting was timely

*State to investigate in wake of Legionnaires' cases*

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State health officials will look into whether Union Memorial Hospital, where five victims of Legionnaires' disease were taken for treatment, reported the cases in a timely manner as required for communicable diseases.

"The concerns are whether the reports were quick," said David Blythe, the state's chief epidemiologist.

"We are completely confident in them looking into that," said Debra Schindler, a hospital spokeswoman.

She said that the infectious disease staff notified the city health department as soon as they found evidence of the Legionella bacteria, and that all of the required protocols for reporting were followed.

Even if the hospital was slow, sanctions would be "minor" and "unlikely," said John Krick, a state epidemiologist.

He said the state gets 70,000 reports of communicable diseases a year and often "multiple reporting streams."

"We need to make a lot of improvements" in the process for reporting, Krick said.

He and Blythe said reporting is not as simple as a doctor picking up a phone and calling the city.

"It's an arduous process," Blythe said.

And in some cases, labs may have to report directly to the state, Krick said.

The cases of Legionnaires' disease at Stadium Place were confirmed Oct. 14, but the son of the woman who died first reported the death Oct. 6 to Habitat America, which is the property manager of Stadium Place. Some residents at a public meeting last week said they knew Oct. 5.

The son told a Habitat America community manager that his mother died from Legionnaire's disease, said Jennifer O'Dell, district manager for Habitat America.

It was unclear where the son got that information, O'Dell said.

O'Dell said she advised the community manager, whom she wouldn't identify, to alert the city Health Department because the woman's death was unconfirmed at the time.

She said Habitat also contacted the Govans Ecumenical Development Corp. which built and owns Stadium Place, and GEDCO notified residents in a flier the next day.

A week later, Wednesday, health officials got the official confirmation of the Legionnaires' disease death.

Schindler said the hospital has logs showing that the staff alerted city health officials "in a timely fashion" the same day after finding the bacteria, and informed "the right people at the right time."

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