



Water Wall Blamed For Legionnaires' Disease Outbreak

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By Matt Smith

Hospitals across the state are checking their facilities after a decorative water wall at a hospital outside Milwaukee is responsible for an outbreak of Legionnaires' Disease, a type of pneumonia.

State health officials say 8 people have been hospitalized after getting sick at St. Luke's South Shore Hospital in Cudahy within about the last month.

Two people are still in the hospital.

The Aurora-based facility has sanitized and turned off the wall and officials say they probably won't re-start it.

Bruce Van Cleave M.D., Aurora's Chief Medical Officer said "we're just concerned that because we had trouble with it, even though we're following all the recommended cleaning procedures we just don't want to put any of our patients or any of our employees at risk and we'll probably not have a water feature here."

Health department officials are working to inform hospitals of what it calls a potential health threat when it comes to water walls, but no official recommendation has been issued.

One area hospital says it is not going to use its water wall for now, because of what happened in Cudahy.

Bellin health in Green Bay says it's erring on the side of caution and discontinuing its water wall.

It's waiting to hear more from the state health department regarding any future recommendations.

Meanwhile, St. Mary's in Green Bay says it is keeping its water wall running.

It was just built as part of its new cancer center, and now the hospital is working hard to keep it clean.

Dan Rocheleau is St. Mary's water guru.

"This is once a week that I'll check this," he said.

He's responsible for maintaining the new addition to the new cancer center, and making sure it's working just right.

On Thursday, Dan takes Action 2 News behind the scenes.

He says the water initially flows from the city, before it's filtered

In fact, several gallons are flushed out before one gallon of clean water goes to the wall.

"As long as the waters are filtered and cleaned and everything is going well, the system works very nicely," he said.

The Centers for Disease Control say people can get Legionnaires' Disease when they breathe in a mist or vapor.

That's what the state health department says happened in Cudahy.

Health officials believe, though, this is only the second time something like this has happened.

"This situation raises our awareness, will make us ever more vigilant in how we care for the water

feature on our campus," said Corrine Vercauteren, St. Mary's Director of Environmental Services.

St. Mary's says it isn't going to stop using its wall.

The disease can't be spread from one person to another.

It's just a reminder, they say, of the importance of upkeep.



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