

Elderly patient in legionnaires scare

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AN ELDERLY patient caught a life-threatening disease at Dumfries Infirmary.

The woman fell ill with Legionnaires' Disease at the hospital while being treated for another illness.

Staff investigating the infection believe it may have come from the infirmary's water supply system.

The incident happened in April, but details only came to light this week after a tip-off to the Standard.

It is the first time in five years anyone has been treated for the deadly disease at DGRI but health chiefs insist swift action by NHS staff prevented the spread of the infection.

Director of Public Health Dr Derek Cox said: "The elderly patient was admitted in April with an unrelated illness but subsequently she developed a Legionella infection.

"The disease causes lung infections and pneumonia and the symptoms include muscle ache, tiredness, headaches, dry cough and fever.

"She was very unwell and we immediately put her on the most appropriate care and treatment which involves taking antibiotics."

Dr Cox, a key member of the emergency team ready to combat any outbreak, said Legionnaires' Disease cannot be spread from person to person and is caught by inhaling water droplets that carry the bacteria.

He added: "It is found in water systems such as showers and can be life-threatening for those who are already ill because their immune systems are weakened."

NHS Dumfries and Galloway immediately began disinfecting showers, bath fittings and the water system was completely flushed and cleaned out.

Chief Operating Officer Jeff Ace said whilst an outbreak was a concern he was sure the swift action taken by staff ensured it would remain an isolated case.

He added: "No other cases of Legionella infection have come to light following rigorous checks and whilst we are not complacent we are confident that the right measures have been put in place.

"The patient has been responding to the care and treatment in place. We continue to monitor closely throughout the hospital to ensure that no potential source is missed."

Mr Ace said he was confident no other cases would be identified.

He added: "Whilst any infection of this nature is a concern, I am confident that the NHS board's Legionella incident management team has implemented all of the appropriate tests and procedures required and that this remains an isolated case.

“I would like to take this opportunity to reassure patients and relatives that it is safe to come into hospital.”