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Legionnaires' disease caused water restrictions

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By [Karen Gardner](#)

Two residents of Tranquility Assisted Living Center in Frederick contracted Legionella, a bacterium that causes Legionnaires' disease, before water restrictions were implemented last week.

The two residents were hospitalized, according to Jacqueline Douge, deputy health officer for the Frederick County Health Department. She would not give any other details about the condition of the residents.

"Legionella is known to be found in water," Douge said. "People can acquire it if they breathe in mist or droplets."

At first, Tranquility shut off the water, according to spokesman Frank Gerhardt.

The Health Department said water to flush toilets could remain on, but showers and water sprayers could not be used. The Health Department is testing the water for bacteria.

Gerhardt said the home plans to bring in a portable shower for its 80 residents, who are mostly elderly.

Residents are using bottled water for drinking and brushing their teeth, and are taking sponge baths. Paper plates and plastic eating utensils are being used.

Legionnaires' disease got its name from an American Legion convention in Philadelphia in 1976, when many of those who attended acquired a type of pneumonia, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It is a bacterial infection, and symptoms usually begin two to 14 days after exposure to the infection.

While healthy people usually recover from the infection, Legionnaires' disease can be deadly in the elderly and people who smoke or have a chronic lung disease.

Douge said have been 76 cases of Legionnaires' disease in Maryland. She does not know whether there have been any deaths.

ABOUT LEGIONELLA

Legionella bacteria are found naturally in the environment. The bacteria grow best in warm water, including water found in hot tubs, cooling towers, hot water tanks, large plumbing systems or parts of the air conditioning systems of large buildings. They have not been found in car or window air conditioners. Legionnaires' disease is contracted when people breathe in mist or vapor that has been contaminated with the bacteria.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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