



Monday, September 28, 2009

Legionella bacteria found at Edelweiss after man's death

By [Seth Robbins](#), Stars and Stripes

European edition, Sunday, September 27, 2009

Legionella bacteria was found in an Edelweiss Lodge and Resort room once occupied by a guest who, according to German health officials, died from Legionnaires' disease earlier this month.

Small amounts of Legionella bacteria were found in the pipes of the room at the Armed Forces Recreation Center's luxury hotel in Garmisch, Germany, where the German man stayed in late August, according to resort officials and the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine Europe, which conducted tests of the resort's water.

The room has been closed since the first week of September, when hotel management was notified that the man's urine had tested positive for the bacteria. The 57-year-old man, who has not been identified, died Sept. 3 in an Austrian hospital.

Results released late Friday showed that five of the 19 water samples taken from the resort were positive for the bacteria, said William Bradner, spokesman for the Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command, which is in charge of the resort. Two samples were above the level at which the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration requires prompt cleaning, and sometimes biocide treatment of the system.

As a precautionary measure, two other rooms that share water piping with the contaminated pipe have also been closed, Bradner said.

"There have been no other reported cases of Legionnaires' from guests of the resort more than 10 days after the initial report — well past the incubation period of the disease," Bradner said in a news release. The release did not say whether anyone else had stayed in the room with the contaminated pipe before it was shut down.

Attempts to reach the health officials who conducted the testing were unsuccessful Saturday. Resort officials did not respond to phone calls.

Legionnaires' disease — a type of pneumonia — is contracted by breathing in mist or vapor contaminated with the Legionella bacteria, which thrives

in warm water. Hot tubs, hot-water tanks, large plumbing systems or parts of the air-conditioning systems of large buildings are common incubators. Symptoms of the disease are usually seen two to 14 days after exposure to the bacteria.

Dozens of strains of Legionella bacteria occur in water, and further testing is needed to determine if the bacteria found in the Edelweiss pipes is the one that causes Legionnaires' disease, Bradner said.

Legionnaires' disease symptoms include high fever, chills and a cough. It can be fatal when undetected, but most cases can be treated successfully with antibiotics, and healthy people usually recover from the infection, according to the National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Individuals most likely to contract the disease are older people, smokers and those with weakened immune systems due to cancer, diabetes or kidney failure. Nationwide, up to 18,000 Americans are hospitalized annually from the illness, according to the CDC's Web site.

The disease is not contagious and cannot be spread by personal contact.

Anyone worried he or she may have been exposed to the Legionella bacteria can receive testing at any base clinic, said Phil Tegtmeier, spokesman for Europe Regional Medical Command.

In Friday's news release, Bradner said that in addition to closing off the rooms, Edelweiss management installed a system that douses the water with chlorine, and that the hotel has also been running its Legionnaires Preventive System, which superheats water to 70 degrees Celsius, or 148 degrees Fahrenheit. The system was also working before the water pipes tested positive for the bacteria, Bradner said. The drinking water is exposed to ultraviolet light that kills harmful bacteria.

"Everything technically possible is being done to prevent bacteria from growing in the resort water system and to protect the guests and employees," Bradner said. "It is important to note that the action levels set by OSHA are significantly below the amounts required to cause an immediate health risk."

© 2009 Stars and Stripes. All Rights Reserved.