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We'll keep water infection at bay

Monday, September 29, 2008, 08:00

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DIRECTORS at Cheltenham General and Gloucestershire Royal hospitals have welcomed a radical programme of disinfection to ensure there are no more outbreaks of Legionnaires' disease.

In July, it was confirmed a case at the hospital in Cheltenham was linked to the water supply. The infection was diagnosed in a patient following a routine urine sample and tests carried out by the Health Protection Agency confirmed there was a link between the infection and samples taken from water pipes.

Legionella bacteria was found in the water system that supplied four wards, including Hazelton Ward, where the patient was.

Steps are being taken to reduce the risk of another case. Infection control officials met experts from the Health Protection Agency, Health and Safety Executive and local environmental health departments to agree an action plan.

Super chlorination with chlorine dioxide is being used as the most effective weapon to fight Legionella, pseudomonads and other pathogenic bacteria simultaneously in the water system.

As a gas released in water, it is able to penetrate the protective layers of slime-forming micro-organisms and leads to its gradual removal from all pipe-work.

It meets drinking water regulations so continual dosing is possible and there is no concern about resistance developing.

Chlorine dioxide also protects pipelines, which are not in continual use.

Monitoring measures of water across the hospital is in place with time temperature surveys and Legionella culture of water supplies.

Graham Lloyd, director of corporate governance and facilities at the trust, spoke at a board meeting of Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

He said: "We've already used chlorine dioxide in the water system at Cheltenham General and in seven weeks' time we expect Gloucestershire Royal to have benefited as well.

"We're implementing a full testing regime, including water quality testing."

Coun Andrew Gravells (C, Abbey), chairman of Gloucestershire's health overview and scrutiny committee, added: "These improvements will hopefully ensure that the risk of cases of Legionnaires' at county hospitals is eliminated."

Hospital-acquired Legionnaires' disease usually originates in water systems.

Legionella not only persists in hot water tanks, it is often found in the thin layers of film through the entire water system.

The patient with Legionnaires, who did not want to be named, is believed to be recovering.

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