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Legionnaires' source was in hospital

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A LEGIONNAIRES' case at Cheltenham General Hospital has been linked to the water supply.

It is the first time the disease has been contracted in a county hospital.

The infection was diagnosed in a patient a fortnight ago following a routine urine sample.

Tests carried out by the Health Protection Agency confirmed yesterday there is a link between the infection and samples taken from water pipes.

Legionella bacteria was found within the water system that supplies four wards including Hazelton Ward, where the patient was admitted.

Health chiefs say it is likely the patient, who has not been named, contracted the disease through the shower system.

Directors of Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust have held regular meetings with a team of investigators from the Health Protection Agency since the diagnosis and have been in touch with a national expert at the Agency's headquarter's in Collindale.

Water pipes at the hospital have already been disinfected and infection control managers have stressed there is no further risk to the public.

Steve Peak, director of operations at Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, said:

"The results have come back positive with low numbers of Legionella bacteria.

"We have no definitive match between the patient and water samples but at this moment in time we are making a link.

"The issue is about making sure the water supply is safe."

Legionnaires' is a form of pneumonia and can be contracted by inhaling mist from baths and showers although the most common cause of the disease is contaminated air.

Since the diagnosis of Legionella, the hospital has undertaken a programme of pasteurisation and chlorination of the water system. Bacterial filters have been fitted to taps to further reduce the risk of contamination and shower heads have been replaced and disinfected.

Regular temperature checks of the water systems will continue to be maintained.

Dr Jim Stone, microbiologist and director of infection control at the Trust, said: "We have not heard of any cases that are linked to the hospital before and that is why this particular case is unusual.

"We are now briefing patients and have given them relevant information.

"We have also contacted patient's GPs to make them aware but have had no further reports of anyone else having acquired the infection.

"I don't think we can ever say we will never have another case at the hospital but we do not anticipate any issues in the future."

Dr Sean Elyan, medical director, added: "We admit 100,000 people each year to the hospital.

"We have made the water system safe and that has been confirmed with water sample testing.

"Our aim is to reassure people that they can seek medical care in a safe environment."

In 2007, there were 10 cases of community acquired Legionnaire's Disease reported to the Gloucestershire Health Protection Team.

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