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Legionella hits Madison Heights cop headquarters

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More than half of the water sites in the Madison Heights Police Department checked for Legionella tested positive in preliminary tests Monday for the bacteria, which causes Legionnaires' disease, Chief Kevin Sagan said today.

This includes kitchen sinks, faucets and bathrooms, he said.

The testing came after the death earlier this month of Officer Ryan Settlemoir, who tested positive for the H1N1, also known as swine flu, virus, according to the state.

His brother, Chris Settlemoir, said Ryan Settlemoir, 28, initially tested positive for Legionnaires' disease, as well. But University of Michigan and Macomb County health officials have said further testing confirmed he didn't have the disease.

The Legionella bacteria grow best in warm water, like those found in hot tubs, hot water tanks and large plumbing systems, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Sagan said 26 out of the department's 45 water sites tested positive in initial tests for the bacteria. Tests of water coming into the building, however, showed no bacteria, "which leads us to believe there's a contamination here inside of the building," Sagan said.

Final test results will come later in the week, he said.

Water was shut off to the department Monday afternoon and a company has been brought in to install a sanitizing chlorination system. Until the water system is safe, department employees have to drink bottled water and use portable bathrooms and hand sanitizer, Sagan said.

Settlemoir was the only officer hospitalized, but not the only one who got sick. About 22 police department employees fell ill between late May and early this month. Sagan said some employees are still complaining of lingering symptoms.

Some officers are getting tested for Legionnaires' disease from their own physicians, while others can follow up with a doctor provided by the city, likely before the end of the week, Sagan said.

According to the CDC, people contract Legionnaires' disease when they breathe in a mist of vapor contaminated with the bacteria. Sagan said the showers in the women's locker room preliminarily tested positive for Legionella, but showers in the men's locker room and booking area tested negative.

James McCurtis, spokesman for the Michigan Department of Community Health, said the state and

CDC conducted tests on Settlemoir and none came back positive for Legionnaires' disease.

Chris Settlemoir said his family is waiting to see what the city will offer before considering taking legal action.

"They way I look at it, our brother was killed on duty," he said. Whatever illnesses he had, "he contracted that at work."

Kara Gavin, spokeswoman for the University of Michigan Medical Center in Ann Arbor, said doctors there still believe Ryan Settlemoir died from H1N1, not Legionnaire's disease.

"We're definitely seeing more patients with H1N1," she said.
