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Three hotels hit by Legionnaires's bug

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Three hotels were the suspected source of Legionnaires disease in 2009 – luckily none of the four patients who contracted it died from the potentially lethal disease.

In one of these cases two persons contracted the disease from the same hotel.

The health authorities are refusing to name the hotels involved, but health division spokesperson confirmed that samples were taken from the three hotels involved.

While no trace of the microbe was found in samples taken from two of the hotels, a third hotel registered “high counts” of the microbe in the hot water system. This hotel carried out further control measures, the spokesperson said.

Four other cases of Legionnaires disease in 2009 occurred in households. Samples were also taken. Only one of these samples registered high counts of the microbe, warranting control measures to the water system of the house. The samples from the other three cases were free from Legionella.

Hotels have been the suspected source of the microbe in most cases occurring in the past years, although cases in households have also been increasing. In 2006, three of the five cases of the disease also occurred in hotels. Likewise, hotels were the suspected source of infection in all five cases of the disease occurring in 2005, and in 13 out of 14 cases occurring in 2004. This sharp increase has prompted the Health Department to issue a circular to all doctors working in hospital advising them on how to tackle the disease.

In order to decrease the occurrence of the lethal disease, a code of practice was distributed to all hoteliers in Malta. A legal notice was issued in January 2006.

According to the law, owners are obliged to test a sample of water circulating in the cooling tower system, fountains and indoor water systems every six months to detect bacteria causing Legionnaires's disease.

The health department has also carried out an audit of all hotels




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to ensure that they all fully abide by the law.

Legionnaires's is a type of pneumonia caused by bacteria, with an overall fatality rate of about 15% which increases among smokers and those with underlying diseases. It is usually contracted by inhaling water vapour that contains the bacteria from hot tubs, showers or A/C units but not from person to person.

Households are advised to regularly check water tanks and insulate them to prevent the temperature of the water from warming up, and to keep geysers at a constant temperature above 60°C. They are also advised not to buy water from bowsers not certified by the Health Department.

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