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Legionnaires' disease confirmed at Rochester General

Justina Wang
Staff writer

Rochester General Hospital confirmed Friday that a patient has legionella pneumonia, but county health officials said other patients are not at immediate risk of contracting the potentially fatal respiratory disease.

Hospital officials earlier this month announced that preliminary tests showed a possible case of Legionnaires' disease, and additional tests over the last 10 days have confirmed the infection.

The strain is "very, very different" than the type of Legionella bacteria found this spring in the shower of another patient's hospital room, said Rochester General spokesperson Michael Tedesco.

The disease, fatal in about 15 percent of cases, is contracted by inhaling Legionella bacteria from contaminated water but is not contagious.

This strain is a "common garden variety" found in water sources throughout the community, Tedesco said. Rochester General has not determined whether the patient acquired the infection in the hospital or somewhere else.

"I don't think we'll ever be able to find that out precisely," Tedesco said.

Hospital staff are working with state health department officials, who have not issued any recommendations for further action.

Earlier this year, after Rochester General reported two cases of Legionnaires', the hospital temporarily required employees and patients to use only bottled water for drinking and personal hygiene.

Chlorine dioxide levels in the hot water system were also increased for three months, and shower heads, ice machines and drinking fountains were disinfected.

Officials have said that the steps were more than sufficient to kill the bacteria.

The latest report of Legionnaires' should not cause any "undue alarm," said John Ricci, a spokesperson for the county health department.

"I don't really believe people should be any more or less concerned about contracting legionella," he said.

"There really probably isn't anything that the individual can do."

About 14 cases of Legionnaires' disease are reported annually in Monroe County.

Outbreaks usually occur in health care settings, which have complex water systems and a high

population of frail and elderly people.

Excluding New York City, 163 preliminary cases of Legionnaires' disease have been reported in New York state this year compared with 234 cases in 2007, health officials in Albany said.

State health officials announced Friday that one of six residents at a senior housing complex in Elmira, Chemung County, who recently contracted Legionnaire's died from the disease.

In Syracuse, one person died and 12 others fell ill this summer in a Legionnaires' outbreak at a hospital and a nearby nursing home.

JUWANG@DemocratandChronicle.com

Includes reporting by The Associated Press.
