



Springfield Hospital patients moved to Tolworth after legionnaires' disease death

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EXCLUSIVE: A 95-year-old woman died in Springfield Hospital after contracting legionnaires' disease, it has been revealed.

Tests carried out on the Tooting ward where the woman was staying later revealed "significant" levels of legionella – the bacteria which causes the deadly disease.

All remaining ward patients have since been moved from Springfield Hospital to Tolworth Hospital. No other patients were affected.

The death only came to light after the Wandsworth Guardian investigated complaints from relatives of patients at Tolworth Hospital, who were to be moved to make way for patients from Springfield.

Peter Houghton, chief executive of the South West London and St George's Mental Health Trust, said: "Patient safety is a priority for the trust, so we are working closely with experts and will continue to do everything necessary to protect patients and staff.

"Water testing is done regularly across the hospital as a routine measure. We have taken appropriate steps to control the problem in the affected area."

The woman died on September 16 last year and her death prompted rigorous testing across the hospital.

In December, water samples on Crocus ward – an assessment unit for older people – picked up "significant" levels of legionella.

As a precautionary measure, the Health Protection Agency (HPA) advised that the ward would be closed. The trust also worked with the HPA to put control measures in place across the Springfield site once the bacteria was detected.

On the advice of the agency, affected areas were chlorinated and remedial plumbing work started.

Dr Paul Crook, from the South West London Health Protection Unit, added: "We are working closely with the trust and national HPA legionella specialists to manage this problem. We would like to reassure the public that the disease cannot be spread from person to person."

Legionnaires' disease is caused by legionella bacteria and is acquired through breathing in tiny droplets of water from an infected source.

A spokesman for Springfield said the hospital regretted the inconvenience caused to patients and their families.

What is legionnaires' disease?

- Legionnaires' disease is a form of pneumonia.
- It mainly affects people over 50, men more than women.
- Early "flu-like" symptoms include muscle aches, tiredness, headaches, dry cough and fever. Diarrhoea and confusion may develop.
- The incubation period ranges from two to 10 days, sometimes up to 14 days and in rare cases some people may develop symptoms as late as three weeks after exposure.

- Cases are commonly caused by cooling towers, hot and cold water systems and spa pools.
- There are about 500 cases a year in England. Nationally detection rates have been increasing partly due to the availability of new diagnostic tests.
- In 2002, Barrow-in-Furness suffered the UK's worst outbreak of legionnaires' disease, where seven people died.

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