

Atlanta hospital finds Legionnaire's bacteria

By MIKE STOBBE, AP Medical Writer
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ATLANTA – Atlanta's largest hospital has found the bacteria that causes Legionnaire's disease in patients' rooms, and officials said Thursday it likely sickened four people who were treated there.

Lab tests showed legionella bacteria in water samples taken from Grady Memorial Hospital rooms on two floors where the patients came down with the disease since Jan. 1, said Dr. Leon Haley, the hospital's deputy chief of staff.

Legionnaire's can be deadly, but was not in these cases. However, 80 beds are off limits while the hospital tests and flushes the water system with hyperchlorinated water. The positive samples were taken from bathroom areas, not air vents.

No signs of the bacteria were found in other parts of the hospital, Haley said, adding that nearly 300 samples were taken.

Legionnaires' disease is a bacterial infection that can cause deadly pneumonia. It does not spread from person to person. Instead, people get it from inhaling contaminated mist or vapor. Tainted shower water, air conditioning systems or whirlpool spas are among the ways the bacteria can get in the air.

The four patients all had been treated at Grady, released, then came down with the disease and returned to the hospital where they were diagnosed. One remains hospitalized.

Grady — a public hospital in downtown Atlanta with about 950 beds — customarily sees only two or three cases of infection with the bacteria each year, officials said.

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Floors likely to reopen at Grady today

Hospital makes changes in wake of Legionnaires'

By [Craig Schneider](#)

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

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Grady Memorial Hospital expects to reopen some areas today that were contaminated with Legionnaires' disease, while implementing \$700,000 in measures to prevent another outbreak, hospital officials said.

Hospital officials said they could not definitively determine whether the four patients with the disease acquired it in the hospital. But widespread testing pinpointed high concentrations of Legionella bacteria in the patient areas of the 11th and 12th floors of the A tower, where those patients were staying, said hospital spokesman Matt Gove.

Those patients have been successfully treated with antibiotics and have been discharged, he said.

Testing traced the contamination to the hospital water system in those patient areas. The water system has been repeatedly flushed with chlorine. Contaminated water must get into the air, as in a shower mist, and inhaled for a person to contract the potentially deadly disease. Legionnaires' is a form of pneumonia.

Today, if tests determine the areas are safe, the hospital will begin moving patients back into the 42 beds on the 11th floor. The 12th-floor area, while safe, will remain closed because the space isn't needed.

The outbreak of Legionnaires' disease arrived as Grady officials were working to rehabilitate the reputation of a hospital that is a vital trauma and safety net for metro Atlanta. The hospital is deep in debt and in need of equipment upgrades, and has begun a campaign to rally contributions from local corporations and foundations.

Grady CEO Michael Young said the handling of the outbreak reflects the hospital's increasing efficiency and urgency to overcome problems. Staff were quick to spot this cluster, he said.

"We were very aggressive and acted very quickly," said Young, who assumed the CEO post in September. "I think people will see we know how to run a hospital," he said.

The hospital already has installed a \$115,000 system that injects chlorine gas into water as it enters the hospital from the municipal water system. The chlorine system, which kills bacteria and other contamination, will cost

\$90,000 a year to maintain.

In addition, about 1,300 special filters have been installed on water faucets and shower heads in in-patient areas throughout the hospital, designed to screen out Legionella bacteria.

Hospital officials said the origin of the high concentrations of the bacteria may never be known, but testing continues.

To further protect the patients, the hospital is installing a new water-heating system that quickly heats and cools water before dispersing it, effectively killing bacteria in the process.

Together, the new precautions, testing and consultant fees will range in cost from \$600,000 to \$700,000, officials said.

Grady's handling of the problem drew praise from the state Division of Public Health, which, along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, worked with the hospital on the problem.

Dr. Susan Lance, an epidemiologist with the state health division, said the agency has asked Grady to document its response to the outbreak to assist other facilities that may develop the problem.

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