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## 2 patients die at UAB after testing positive for legionellosis

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By WBRC Staff - email

BIRMINGHAM, AL (WBRC) - Two out of eight patients who tested positive for the legionella bacteria have died at UAB, hospital officials confirm.

Legionella is a bacteria that can cause a form of pneumonia called legionellosis, or Legionnaire's disease, according to Dr. Loring Rue, UAB's Chief Patient Safety and Clinical Effectiveness Officer.

Rue says most people are exposed to legionella regularly and usually don't get legionellosis, but people with weak immune systems are typically more susceptible to legionellosis.

Most people get infected by inhaling the bacteria. It can't be transferred by person to person contact.

After eight patients in the hematology/oncology unit tested positive for legionellosis, UAB Hospital implemented water restrictions in a section of the hospital on Saturday.

The bacteria was discovered in one unit that shares plumbing with two floors. So far, they have not found any new infections outside of that one unit.

The hospital installed filters on shower and faucet heads, flushed the water system and shocked it with extreme temperatures in an effort to make sure the water was safe, Rue said. They also asked patients to wear masks when flushing the toilet.

"Two patients who were on the unit prior to the remediation of the water system and tested positive for legionella, have died. The causes of their deaths have not been determined. We only know that in addition to their original illness the patients tested positive for legionella," Rue said in a release.

Dr. Rue said just because someone tests positive for legionella bacteria does not mean they have Legionnaire's disease.

Since making the effort to address legionella, the hospital has not seen any new infections among patients.

"Legionella bacteria are found naturally in the environment, usually in water. The bacteria grow best in warm water, like the kind found in hot tubs, hot water tanks and large plumbing systems common in office buildings, schools, hotels and hospitals ... According to the CDC, most cases of legionellosis can be treated successfully with antibiotics," Rue said.

Many of the precautionary water restrictions that were implemented over the weekend were lifted on Monday, May 26.

The hospital says they're continuing to make the safety of patients, staff and visitors a primary concern.

The full statement from Dr. Loring Rue, UAB's Chief Patient Safety and Clinical Effectiveness Officer, is below:

*UAB Hospital has lifted most of the water restrictions it implemented in a limited area of the hospital late Saturday. Those precautionary measures were implemented out of an abundance of caution pending final results of tests after eight patients on one unit – hematology/oncology – tested positive for legionella, a bacteria that can cause a form of pneumonia called legionellosis.*

*We took proper actions to address the presence of legionella and installed special filters on shower and faucet heads, flushed the water system, and shocked it with extreme temperatures, to ensure safe use. We have consulted with public health authorities including local and state departments of health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and implemented these measures pursuant to proposed guidelines of the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) commonly followed in the U.S. and referred to by the CDC. We have no knowledge of new infections contracted after our remediation efforts.*

*Until we receive the test results that confirm these steps addressed the presence of legionella, we have asked that patients wear masks when flushing the toilet. Although the initial water restriction limited sink and shower use, that has been addressed by the filters.*

*Two patients who were on the unit prior to the remediation of the water system and tested positive for legionella, have died. The causes of their deaths have not been determined. We only know that in addition to their original illness the patients tested positive for legionella.*

*Legionella bacteria are found naturally in the environment, usually in water. The bacteria grow best in warm water, like the kind found in hot tubs, hot water tanks and large plumbing systems common in office buildings, schools, hotels and hospitals. Most people are exposed to legionella regularly and do not contract legionellosis. People with weak immune systems are more susceptible to legionellosis. According to the CDC, most cases of legionellosis can be treated successfully with antibiotics.*

*We will continue to make the safety of patients, staff and visitors our primary concern and communicate throughout this process.*