

LA Fitness in Ocoee probed for Legionnaire's outbreak

[Paul Brinkmann](#)



State health officials hope to know early next week if an outbreak of Legionnaire's disease was definitely linked to the LA Fitness gym in Ocoee.

Three people who went to the gym at 1560 E. Silver Star Road recently contracted the disease, according to the Florida Department of Health in [Orange County](#). The disease can result in a severe form of pneumonia.

LA Fitness followed health department recommendations to decontaminate its hot tub and change out shower heads, said Alvina Chu, epidemiology program manager with the health department.

She declined to provide the status of the gym-goers who became ill, citing confidentiality rules. She said it's common for patients with Legionnaire's to be hospitalized.

"They had gone to the gym in the exposure window, a few days before they became ill," Chu said. "We continuously look for other exposures, and this was the common one we found."

LA Fitness shut off access to the showers and hot tub upon being notified by the state, then installed specially filtered shower heads that eliminate bacteria from the shower stream, she said.



State investigators pulled water samples from the gym before steps were taken to clean up the facility. Those samples have been sent to a lab in Jacksonville, Chu said.

"It takes seven days to grow out the samples, so we should know something by Monday or Tuesday," she said.

The LA Fitness media office didn't respond to requests for comment.

Legionnaires' is caused by Legionella bacteria, which naturally exists in the general environment and fresh water.

It generally cannot spread from person to person, and can be found in man-made water systems such as hot tubs, spas, hot-water tanks and other pumping systems.

Symptoms are similar to other forms of pneumonia, including coughing, high fever and shortness of breath. Symptoms present themselves within two days to two weeks after exposure.

Over the past few years, Legionnaire's disease was investigated at Florida Hospital and at SpringHill Suites Hotel in Altamonte Springs.

Some people are at higher risk of getting Legionnaire's, including people 50 or older, current or former smokers, people with a chronic lung disease (like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or emphysema); people with weak immune systems from diseases like cancer, diabetes, or kidney failure; and people who take drugs that weaken the immune system such as those prescribed after a transplant operation or chemotherapy.

In January 2016, Florida Hospital Orlando's water tested positive for Legionella, leading the hospital to hire a firm to flush its water system.

The chain of events began in late 2015, when a critically ill patient at Florida Hospital Orlando tested positive for Legionella, but the hospital said there were no instances of people acquiring the disease at the hospital. The strain of Legionella found in the hospital water system was different from that the patient had.

Each year, between 8,000 and 18,000 people in the United States need care in a hospital because of Legionnaires' disease, according to [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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