

## **New cases of Legionnaire's at hotel**

Two recent guests at Albany hotel fell ill from the disease; six were sickened last year

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ALBANY — Two new cases of Legionnaire's disease have been linked to an Albany hotel that closed for nearly two months earlier this year to remove the bacteria from its water system.

Two guests from Washington County who stayed at the Best Western Sovereign Hotel on Western Avenue on May 16 and 17 were diagnosed with Legionnaire's disease, according to Albany County Department of Health. One is still sick with pneumonia.

"It's not unheard of for this to happen again," said Mary Rozak, spokeswoman for the county health department. "Sometimes, even with the most diligent response, there can be additional cases."

Six guests who stayed at the hotel between September and December fell ill with Legionnaire's disease. The hotel closed for most of February and March to fix the problem and reopened in April after health department tests showed bacteria levels had receded.

Legionella is a naturally occurring bacteria that exists in nearly every body of water, but it can grow to dangerous levels under certain conditions. The elderly and people with respiratory problems or compromised immune systems are at higher risk of developing Legionnaire's when the bacteria is breathed into the lungs on water mist. Symptoms of the respiratory infection include chills, muscle aches and a high fever. It usually develops 2 to 14 days after exposure and can be fatal.

On Thursday morning, even before tests had confirmed that the hotel's water was contaminated, the hotel had begun flushing the hot water system with chlorine dioxide. By Thursday afternoon, tests had confirmed Legionella in the hotel's water, Rozak said.

Mansoor Mustafa, the hotel's general manager, said the hotel would voluntarily close until the problem is resolved, and a handful of guests staying at the hotel would be moved to other hotels.

Earlier this year, the hotel replaced its 40-year-old hot water heater and installed new pipes to carry water from the street to the new heaters. The hotel also replaced all shower heads, although health officials said the hotel prematurely replaced the shower heads before completing the remediation.

Health officials are speculating that the new shower heads may have been contaminated.

The hotel's pool and restaurant are served by separate water systems and have not shown any signs of being contaminated, according to the health department.

The health department is ordering the hotel to install a permanent chlorine dioxide system to disinfect the water and undergo monthly water testing. The hotel will not be allowed to reopen until new water samples come back uncontaminated.

"The hotel has been very cooperative," Rozak said.

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