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2 Vernon Hills Deaths Tied To Legionnaires Disease



VERNON HILLS, Ill. (CBS) — Public health authorities were investigating the cause of Legionnaires' disease associated with the deaths of two residents at a Vernon Hills retirement home.

Reporting
[Derrick Blakley](#)

As CBS 2's Derrick Blakley reports, the deaths were causing anxiety for many residents and their families.

Alarm bells sounded after a resident who recently had moved out of the The Park at Vernon Hills died, infected with Legionnaires' disease.

"Because earlier this year, we had another resident with the same diagnosis, it did throw up a huge red flag with the health department," said Jane Wolloson, executive director of the 274-unit retirement complex.

As of Saturday, four cases had been confirmed and seven others were suspected. Residents' families were worried.

Fred Kreuch, whose mother lives at The Park, said he's taking her out for at least one night.

"It's a good excuse to get her over to my house. ... I'll keep her there until I hear it's safe. Better safe than sorry is my attitude," he said.

Investigators were focusing on a unique feature of the complex: its tropical atrium.

Legionnaires' disease is contracted by inhaling contaminated mist or water vapor. As a precaution, health officials have turned off a popular waterfall in the rainforest atrium and shut down the heated pool and hot tub. And they've asked residents to take baths, not showers.

But Lothar Brun, an 82-year-old resident at The Park, said he's not concerned.

Burn is a former Abbott Labs employee who was at the scene of the original outbreak, a 1976 American Legion convention in Philadelphia.

"Some have needlessly panicked," said Brun. "There's no reason to panic, really."

But the Illinois Public Health Department still didn't know on Saturday if the atrium waters were the cause of the outbreak. That was keeping residents' families on edge.

"Until they can track down where it originates, they can't dean it up," said Roberta Schaeffer, whose 93-year-old mother lives at The Park. "They have to find what's causing it."

State public health investigators already have tested the pool, plumbing, water filters, and heating and cooling systems at The Park at Vernon Hills for contamination. The results of those tests weren't completed as of Saturday.

Investigators planned to return Monday to interview any residents or staff who might have had pneumonia-type symptoms.

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Two deaths at The Park at Vernon Hills retirement home have been tied to Legionnaires' disease. A total of four cases have been confirmed and seven more suspected cases were being tested.

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