

Southwestern Veterans' Center confirms Legionella bacteria in water

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Updated:

The Southwestern Veterans' Center has confirmed it's had low levels of Legionella bacteria in its water.

11 Investigates first learned about this problem when someone provided us a letter sent out from the veterans' center.

Channel 11 learned there are still precautions being taken there with patients and staff drinking bottled water, while retesting is going on after low levels of Legionella were found there.

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11 Investigates uncovered Tuesday that a patient at the Southwestern Veterans' Center tested positive for Legionnaires' Disease on June 8 and was admitted to the VA Hospital in Oakland for treatment.

The Southwestern Veterans' Center is a state-run nursing home. A letter obtained by 11 Investigates was sent to patients' families saying, "Even though the facility is equipped with a very good water purification system, which is tested monthly, it was prudent for us to start immediately testing certain water fixtures."

Several water fixtures like shower heads and drinking fountains tested positive for low levels of Legionella bacteria.

"In order to get Legionnaires' Disease, you have to be exposed to the bacteria from the water, it has to get into your lungs and the lungs of the individual have to be susceptible to an infection," said Dr. Janet Stout, an expert in Legionnaires' Disease at Special Pathogens Laboratory in Pittsburgh. Stout told Channel 11 a long-term disinfection plan is as important as an aggressive cleaning when the bacteria is first discovered.

"Those single knock downs, Legionella comes right back up, so it grows again even though you've controlled it initially," Stout said.

SWVC told 11 Investigates it did a hot flush to the water system and is still taking universal precautions.

The veterans' center is retesting for Legionella this week.

11 Investigates has also learned that the federal VA, the state Department of Health and the Allegheny County Department of Health have been notified.

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