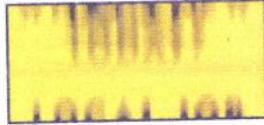


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# Senior center fights Legionnaires' disease

Wednesday July 14, 2004

By ANGELA STEWART  
 STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Health officials in Paterson continued to advise residents at a senior housing center yesterday not to drink the tap water or to use the showers after two people were stricken by Legionnaires' disease, one of them fatally.

Both victims lived in the Nathan Barnert Senior Housing Center, owned by the city's housing authority.

Richard Guthrie Jr., 82, died Thursday at Barnert Hospital in Paterson of Legionnaires', a deadly bacterial infection. A 76-year-old woman was reported in stable condition at the hospital yesterday and said to be improving. Her identity was not released by authorities.

No other residents of the 96-unit building on Keen Street have exhibited symptoms of the illness, according to Stephen Summers, a spokesman for the Passaic County Department of Health.

He said officials from the Paterson Division of Health, along with county and state health officials, are monitoring the situation.

Symptoms of Legionnaires' usually include fever, chills and a cough, which may be dry or may produce phlegm. Sometimes, victims also experience muscle pain, headache and diarrhea. The illness can be treated with antibiotics.

Paterson Housing Authority officials shut off the hot water Saturday after preliminary lab results from the state Department of Health detected bacteria in the water supply. The building's water system is being remediated by an outside firm, and the 117 residents are being provided with bottled water for drinking, washing and bathing until the system is cleaned.

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Yesterday, only the cold water remained on for the sole purpose of flushing toilets, Summers said.


"They are starting the remediation process today, using a chemical treatment for the water to kill the bacteria," he explained. "We could be looking toward the end of the week or thereabout for closure on this. We want to make sure this is cleaned up quickly and efficiently."

Legionnaires' disease is not known to be spread from person to person. It most commonly affects seniors, smokers and those with weakened immune systems. The bacteria is acquired through drops of water or steam, so authorities suspect the most likely site of transmission in the Paterson cases was the shower.

Last year 65 cases of Legionnaires' disease were reported to the state health department, of which seven were fatal. The last reported death was in October and involved a Passaic County resident, said Donna Leusner, a health department spokeswoman. The other deaths last year occurred in Burlington, Essex, Mercer, Ocean and Union counties.

This year, 31 Legionnaires' cases have been reported. Most cases have been single, isolated events, with outbreaks being relatively rare.

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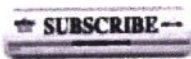
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