

Water safety and testing

This leaflet explains about the bacteria that may be in the hospital water supply and how and why we monitor them to keep patients, visitors and staff safe.

Which bacteria?

Specifically legionella and pseudomonas aeruginosa which are bacteria which live naturally in water supplies.

Are legionella and pseudomonas aeruginosa found anywhere else?

These bacteria are found widely in the environment, in soil and are found in higher quantities in unused pipes, hot water systems and humidifiers – that is why it is important to flush taps, showers and toilets not in daily use, and to carry out a monitoring regime that involves testing water samples.

Are these bacteria harmful?

Usually, these bacteria are not harmful when swallowed. However, they can cause problems when inhaled, or if they come into contact with wounds. However, the risk of you contracting an illness from these bacteria is considered to be low.

How these bacteria can affect us

Legionella: People can catch Legionnaires' disease (a form of pneumonia) by inhaling small droplets of water containing the legionella pneumophila bacteria that are suspended in the air.

Pseudomonas aeruginosa: Wound infections and pneumonia can occur by direct contact with contaminated water, contaminated equipment, or through indirect contact with contaminated water on the hands of a healthcare worker.

How we prevent legionella and pseudomonas being a problem in our Trust

The Trust Estates Team undertake regular monitoring of the water system temperature and take samples for legionella and pseudomonas aeruginosa testing if necessary. This is

to ensure the bacteria stays within acceptable levels, especially in warm water (above 20°C and below 55°C) as the bacteria may increase to a level where it could cause harm.

What happens if higher than acceptable levels of legionella and pseudomonas aeruginosa are found during routine checks?

If samples show increased levels of the bacteria during checks, these are reported to the Trust Water Safety Group. The Trust may fit filters onto (or will replace) showers and taps and will flush the system. If levels remain high, we will carry out a disinfection of the hot and cold water system pipes that feed the affected rooms. Retesting and monitoring of water quality will continue through regular water sampling.

Will the monitoring regime affect me while I'm in hospital?

There is a very small possibility that you may be moved from your room or bay. This is no cause for concern – in the unlikely event that you need to be moved, it will be to ensure your comfort is maintained as the water supply cannot be used during the disinfection process.

Where can I get more information?

Contact the Infection Control Team on 0118 322 7114

Email: infection.control@royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Infection Prevention & Control / Estates

Written: October 2018

Review due: October 2020