



Water safety and testing

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

Which bacteria?

Specifically, legionella and pseudomonas aeruginosa, which are bacteria that 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.

Questions and concerns

If you have any questions or concerns about water safety and testing, please ask your nurse for further information or you can contact the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust Infection Control team on 0118 322 6914, email: infection.control@royalberkshire.nhs.uk.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Simon Wells, RBFT Infection Prevention & Control, November 2024

Next review due: November 2026