

Legionnaires' disease bacteria found at hotel; one guest died

December 1 2015, by Jim Salter

The bacteria that causes Legionnaires' disease was found in rooms of a hotel in a popular Missouri tourist town associated with Mark Twain, and health officials said Tuesday that one of three people who contracted the disease after staying there has died.

Missouri [health officials](#) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention launched an investigation last month of the Best Western on the River Hotel in Hannibal. The hotel sits a block from the home where Mark Twain spent his childhood, and sites connected to the author attract about 500,000 visitors to Hannibal each year.

The CDC took 40 samples on Nov. 10. Samples from four rooms tested positive for Legionella bacteria, said Ryan Hobart, spokesman for the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. What caused the bacteria remains under investigation.

Hobart said all three people who became ill had stayed at the hotel over the previous eight months. One of them died. Hobart said he could not provide information about whether the death was specifically due to the respiratory illness or give any information about that person.

Hannibal, in northeast Missouri, is about 20 miles down the Mississippi River from Quincy, Illinois, where an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease occurred earlier this year at the Illinois Veterans Home, contributing to 12 deaths and sickening dozens more.

The illness is a type of pneumonia caused by bacteria that infect the lungs. Named after a 1976 outbreak among participants of an American Legion convention in Philadelphia, the disease can cause coughs, breathing trouble, fever and muscle aches, and death in extreme cases. People can get sick if they inhale mist or vapor from contaminated water systems, hot tubs and other typical sources.

Information on the U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration website said about 25,000 cases of Legionnaires' disease occur annually, with more than 4,000 deaths.

The Hannibal hotel consists of two buildings—an older structure, and one completed just this year. Hobart said the new wing of the hotel was not yet in operation when the outbreak occurred. It was inspected as a precaution and no problems were found. That building is open for guests.

The older structure remains closed. The Hannibal Courier-Post reported that papers taped to the hotel's main entrance advised that it was shut for "renovations." A man answering the phone at the hotel hung up on a reporter who called.

Hobart said hotel management has been cooperative. He said remedies will involve "superheating and/or hyper-chlorination of the facility's potable water system." It was unclear when the [hotel](#) building would be allowed to reopen.

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