

**DES MOINES, Iowa** – To be proactive in messaging about environmental water testing for Legionella, VA Central Iowa Health Care System has released the following public statement.

“VA Central Iowa Health Care System takes water safety very seriously, maintaining the high national VA standard of safety with routine testing and aggressive action taken to prevent contaminants from entering the medical center’s water system,” Kristi Catrenich, a spokesman for the VACIHCS, said. “Our Water Safety Committee comprised of Occupational Safety and Health professionals along with Infections Disease experts lead these mitigation efforts to ensure the water system at VACIHCS is safe “

“On February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016, we received our most recent routine tests back noting positive results for *Legionella* bacteria in small amounts in one isolated location within the facility. This bacterium has not been found in any other water samples to date. The water supply to the small affected area was immediately isolated and removed from service, where a thorough cleaning was conducted in compliance with the Legionella Mitigation Plan along with follow-on safety precautions to open the isolated area back up for use. At no point was patient care delayed due to this situation and clinical reviews are being conducted for any patients that stayed in the small isolated area in the recent past. Follow up water testing has been completed and sent to the lab with anticipated negative findings.”

"It should be noted that this situation validated that the water safety plan at VACIHCS is working and that these routine tests gives us the ability to mitigate threats before there is a problem," Catrenich said.

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## **Facts about bacteria found in VACIHCS water system**

- VACIHCS tests for *Legionella* on a quarterly basis, in accordance with VA standards which exceed the Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidance.
- The positive test result was a low amount found in a singular location---an individual sink, for example.
- In response to the finding, VACIHCS has activated the Legionella Mitigation Plan.
- We will continue to routinely sample the water and take appropriate actions as required.

## **General facts about *Legionella***

- *Legionella* is a common environmental bacterium. It can be found in natural, freshwater environments, but it is generally present in insufficient numbers to cause disease. Potable (drinking) water systems, whirlpool spas, and cooling towers provide the two main conditions needed for Legionella colonization, heat and stasis (stagnant conditions). Therefore, these are common sources of water colonization.
- About 50 percent of the strains of *Legionella* bacteria are capable of causing Legionnaires’ disease.
- Most people with Legionnaires' disease will have pneumonia (lung infection) since the *Legionella* bacteria grow and thrive in the lungs.
- People get Legionnaires’ disease either when they breathe in mist or vapor containing *Legionella* bacteria or when a large enough amount of the bacteria is consumed. *Legionella* bacteria are NOT spread from one person to another person.
- Detecting *Legionella* in water when at low levels and eliminating it at that point is the key to preventing infection. The goal of a testing and mitigation program is to prevent heavy colonization of a water supply that would pose a risk to individuals.
- Most people exposed to the bacteria do not become ill.
- More About *Legionella* can be found on the CDC website, the source the general information above:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/legionella/fastfacts.html>