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## Hospital on alert as deadly Legionnaires bacteria is detected

**Water bug strikes second health facility in area**

By [Louise Hogan](#)

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A second hospital in the Midlands has detected unacceptable levels of the bacteria responsible for causing the potentially deadly Legionnaires' Disease in its water system.

Precautions have been taken at the busy Midland Regional Hospital in Mullingar, Co Westmeath, after tests on the water system identified the presence of legionella.

The Health Services Executive (HSE) confirmed that levels of the bacteria were "not hugely high, but above acceptable levels".

No one has contracted Legionnaires' Disease, which is a potentially fatal form of pneumonia, and measures including the removal of shower heads have been carried out to alleviate the risk.

Earlier this year, concerns were raised about the showers at St Loman's Hospital in Mullingar following the discovery of the dangerous bacteria.

The HSE said a new water treatment system had since been installed at the mental health facility, while other control measures such as the cleaning and replacement of water tanks were ongoing.

The drinking water at the facility was not affected, an HSE spokeswoman said.

Staff have also raised concerns over "a lack of urgency" in tackling the problem and the amount of funding being allocated.

"The risk seems to be played down," one person said.

The new water system has only been installed in one unit, and no works have been carried out on the main building, it was claimed.

Following a visit to the hospital, Peter Kelly, Fianna Fail's Longford/Westmeath TD, wrote to health service bosses seeking bottled drinking water for patients.

"When this was discovered in October it should have been dealt with immediately," Mr Kelly said.

Legionnaires' Disease is contracted by inhaling the legionella bacteria in water droplets from contaminated systems.

A risk assessment report carried out at the mental health facility, St Loman's, seen by the Irish Independent, found there were no control systems in place at the hospital.

Several high positive samples of the bacteria, legionella, were recorded during random water testing at the hospital, according to the report.

In some areas there were no rodent screens present to stop rats and mice invading the water system; while in other instances at the hospital, dating back to 1855, there was corrosion and debris in the water systems.

- *Louise Hogan*