

Legionnaires' Disease Claims Three at JW Marriott Chicago

Where: 151 W. Adams St. , Chicago, IL, 60603

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New this May, JW Marriott Chicago's chlorine-less pool touted a UV-light filtration process

Here's what we know so far: [an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease has been connected to 10 guests who visited or stayed at the JW Marriot Chicago](#) between mid-July and mid-August. As of this past Friday, three of those guests died from the disease. The same strain of legionella bacteria found in the ill guests was also found in JW Marriott Chicago's pool, whirlpool, and decorative fountain in the main lobby, all of which have since been drained. The bacteria was also found in the men's and women's lockers rooms.

The Chicago Department of Public Health reported last week that the JW Marriott was fully cooperating with the ongoing investigation and had taken the recommended measures to reduce the risk of exposure. They now believe **there is no ongoing health threat at the hotel.**

It's heavy hotel news, but sadly, legionnaires' happens in the hotel (hot-tubbing, cruise-shiping and hospital-going) world. Last year alone, it sickened two guests and claimed the life of another at [Luxor](#), and sickened six at [Aria](#), both in Vegas.

Essentially a severe pneumonia, legionnaires' is caused by high concentrations of legionella bacteria that show up in water. It can survive for many months in that wet environment, especially in warm water. Transmission isn't totally understood, but the gist of it is that it's not spread by person-to-person contact but by inhaling or ingesting the legionella microbes (read: drinking the water, breathing in the vapor above and around the water). Once contracted, legionnaires' can take anywhere from two to eight days to show up.

Deep in the hotel trenches, we also know that **the new-in-May pool at JW Marriott was very unique in its UV filtration process—an important fact absent from the majority of news on the outbreak.** Dubbed a high-tech pool by the hotel, the 11.2 meter **chlorine-less pool was instead filtered by UV-light.** According to the hotel's original press release on the pool, "the water flows through UV-light chambers to eliminate 99% of all toxins and bacteria resulting in less chlorine in the pool than in average drinking water." The release continues, "The absence of chlorine eliminates allergies and irritations and offers the feeling of swimming in a fresh water lake."



Just steps from the UV-filtered pool, the whirlpool was thoroughly chlorinated. Still, hot tub vapors can carry legionella bacteria

While we can only speculate, **we're guessing the UV-filtration system will go far away after this is all over.** Fair to say that we'll be dubious of any other swimmable chlorine knock-offs moving forward, too.

Still, though we're almost never, ever fans of hotel hot tubs, we don't want to stop enjoying hotel swimming pools.

If you plan to keep diving into one or both, here are a few things to know:

First, it's easier to **stay out of hot tubs** as it's next to impossible to avoid the rising cooling tower vapor that carries the microbes. Not to mention that legionella bacteria just grows too well in hot tub cooling systems.

Second, if you insist on going the hot tub route, **avoid hot tub parties.** Apparently, too many people up in the tub means an abundance of dead skin and other organic matter, which taxes the disinfectant and fuels the bacterial growth. We'd add that **any hot tub that's even remotely sketchy should be avoided,** literally, like the plague.

[Photos: Nina Kokotas Hahn]

http://www.hotelchatter.com/story/2012/8/31/13846/7917/hotels/Legionnaires%92_Disease_Claims_Three_at_JW_Marriott_Chicago