

Get the Facts

A safer, stronger era of *Legionella* control at VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

FACT: VA Pittsburgh is committed to keeping our stakeholders informed about our ongoing *Legionella* control efforts aimed at creating the safest environment possible for our nation's heroes to heal. Our communication efforts on this front include maintaining a public hotline, hosting community meetings, producing frequently asked questions documents and regularly posting updates on our website.

FACT: VA Pittsburgh is not navigating the world of *Legionella* control alone. Other hospitals have reached out to us for guidance, and we are sharing the tough lessons that we have learned from this tragedy. Just as we did with our MRSA bundle, we will usher in a new era of smarter, safer infection control.

FACT: VA Pittsburgh tests for *Legionella* pneumonia in every patient with suspected or diagnosed pneumonia. We also test our water system every two weeks and monitor our chlorine levels daily. This testing frequency is one of the most rigorous in the health care industry today.

FACT: Scientists cannot guarantee the permanent eradication of *Legionella* from water. This means that we will continue to observe the bacteria in our water system—and that our current surveillance efforts are working. Our new zero-tolerance policy means that we remediate each and every time we detect even a single colony of *Legionella* in our water.

FACT: VA Pittsburgh's current *Legionella* surveillance program is markedly more sensitive and comprehensive than our pre-outbreak system. Our water samples are now 10 times larger, and we can detect even a single colony of *Legionella* in these samples. In addition, we now collect both water and swab samples from some 200 water fixtures monthly and test for *Legionella* pneumonia in every patient with diagnosed or suspected pneumonia. These rigorous surveillance efforts have led us to diagnose seven cases of community-acquired *Legionella* pneumonia in 2013.

FACT: VA Pittsburgh's work with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Environmental Protection Agency has identified significant gaps in the science of *Legionella* control.

FACT: By partnering with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, we have built one of the strongest *Legionella* control systems in health care today.

FACT: VA Pittsburgh is committed to serving and healing veterans, and we have taken great pride in fulfilling this honor each and every day of the year for the past 88 years. Our survivorship rates—in general and for pneumonia, specifically—best every other hospital in Pittsburgh. We have passed every review conducted by The Joint Commission. We are the only VA to receive the American Heart Association's highest honor for heart failure care. We performed a record number of kidney and liver transplants in 2012. Our exceptional patient care record will continue as we usher in this new era of enhanced *Legionella* control.

FACT: VA Pittsburgh identified this issue. We first reported this issue to the media. We fixed this issue. Now, we are moving the entire science of *Legionella* control—and our noble mission of serving veterans—forward.

FACT: We have observed spikes of *Legionella* in our water for decades. Each time, we successfully treated and retested our water. In 2012, this issue escalated, and we took immediate action.

FACT: VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System is no stranger to pioneering new infection control solutions that lead to better, safer care for veterans. In 2011, the New England Journal of Medicine highlighted our success in reducing Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (or MRSA) infections in health care settings. Today, hospitals throughout the world have adopted this infection prevention strategy, known as the MRSA bundle.

To our VA Pittsburgh community:

We again extend our sincere condolences to all veterans and loved ones impacted by this tragedy, and we remain committed to maintaining the safest environment possible for our nation's heroes to heal.