

# The Star-Ledger

## **Bacteria that causes Legionnaire's disease found in N.J. prison water**

By Blake Nelson

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New Jersey officials have found a potentially deadly bacteria in the water at one of New Jersey's largest prisons, according to a staff memo obtained by NJ Advance Media.

Legionella was detected in a medical building at Northern State Prison in Newark, according to the document, and staff have since moved inmates out of the affected area. The bacteria causes Legionnaire's disease, a form of pneumonia especially dangerous for people with compromised immune systems, according to the Mayo Clinic.

Experts say prisoners generally have more health problems than the general population.

While an inmate did recently die at that facility, it was not necessarily connected to the bacteria, according to William Sullivan, president of NJ PBA Local 105, the state's largest corrections union.

More information about the death, including the prisoner's identity, was not immediately available. A corrections spokeswoman did not respond to questions sent late Thursday, and messages left with the state health department on Friday were not immediately returned.

State prisons were already hit hard by the pandemic, and the discovery of the bacteria came almost exactly a year after the first inmate died with the coronavirus.

Legionnaire's has also surfaced behind bars in recent years in California and Florida.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control notes that the disease comes from breathing in the bacteria and can't easily spread from drinking contaminated water.

The department has nonetheless brought in bottled water, Sullivan said, and other facilities have also recently been checked. While the bacteria was found in one part of East Jersey State Prison, it was in an area that hadn't been used in years, he added.

Northern State opened in the late 1980s and housed about 1,800 people at the start of the year, according to a state report. Only one other prison had more.

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*