

Legionnaire's disease victim sues retirement home

Man files \$225 million lawsuit against Stadium Place developers and others

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"Big" Max Taylor Jr. barely survived the Legionnaire's disease he contracted last year while living at a Baltimore retirement community for low-income seniors, but he's not sure his current existence quite qualifies as living.

His speech is slurred, his balance is off, and he uses a walker to get from place to place — effects of the stroke he says was brought on by the Legionnaire's. He's had to move from Baltimore, where he was born and raised, to Charlotte, N.C., so his grown son, "Little" Max Taylor III, can tend to his basic needs. And he can't stand any of it.

"I didn't need nobody; now I have to depend on my son," said Taylor, 67, in a recent phone interview. "It's terrible."

But the worst part, say the Taylors, who filed a \$225 million lawsuit Wednesday against the retirement community's owners and others, is that the bacteria that causes the disease might not be gone from Stadium Place apartments, where it sickened at least 10 people and killed one last fall.

A March report by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which analyzed the outbreak, concluded that cleanup efforts have not eradicated the risk.

"To date, several environmental interventions at the apartment complex have been only partially successful," reads the report, which was obtained by the Taylors' attorneys — Weltchek Mallahan & Weltchek LLC — through a Freedom of Information Act request.

"Colonization has been reduced, but not eliminated," the CDC report said.

City and state health officials, who are monitoring the situation, say the threat has been contained and that there's no evidence of danger.

"At this point, we see that the facility is not at risk," said Olivia D. Farrow, Baltimore's interim health commissioner. They've done extensive testing and flushing of the water systems, she said, and "haven't seen any additional cases."

Legionnaire's bacteria thrive in warm water, and the disease — a deadly form of pneumonia — spreads through inhalation. It causes flu-like symptoms that usually can be treated with antibiotics but can be fatal for those with compromised immune systems, like many elderly people. About 100 cases are diagnosed in Maryland each year.

A visitor to Stadium Place, a four-building complex at the former site of Memorial Stadium, came down with the disease as late as December, according to health officials and property managers. Water restrictions were in effect through February.