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Socorro Hotel Probed For Deadly Disease

Hotel's Owner Also Doctor, Mayor

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SOCORRO, N.M. -- A Socorro hotel is being investigated after the state Health Department and the Environment Department said two people contracted a potentially deadly disease.

The Best Western Inn in Socorro shut down its pool and spa after the health department said two people who stayed in the hotel contracted Legionnaires' disease.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention legionnaires is a type of pneumonia that you get when you breathe in mist or vapors that can come from water. The CDC said it can cause death in up to 5 percent to 30 percent of cases.

It's certainly something the Best Western's owner, who is also the mayor and a doctor, said he's not taking lightly.

"(It's) very serious. I mean, you know, we don't want to be the source of something that's that kind of infection," said owner Ravi Bhasker.

The health department said a test of the Best Western returned a positive sample for legionella -- the bacteria that causes Legionnaires' disease. But Bhasker said he has not seen those results yet. "Presumptively they're telling us we're the source of it, but we're not really accepting that until I see the specific reports," said Bhasker.

Bhasker said he has hired his own consultant who has tested the facility and said the results have come back negative, but he said he's not taking any chances.

"We're going to treat it as if it came from our hotel, but we're still not sure we are the place," Bhasker said.

Bhasker said the spa and pool will go through an extensive cleaning process and adds the hotel has remained open.

The health department said it is nearing the end of its investigation, after contacting everyone who stayed in the hotel within two weeks of the people who contracted Legionnaires' disease.