# Belfast's new maternity hospital faces delays due to bacterial outbreak



The anticipated opening of Belfast's new maternity hospital has encountered unexpected delays attributed to an outbreak of a potentially hazardous bacteria known as pseudomonas. This concern was highlighted during a recent session of Stormont’s Health Committee, where health officials provided updates on the situation.

Health chiefs revealed that they are still investigating the origins of the bacterial outbreak, which has resulted in postponements that have now extended for several years. Originally anticipated to commence operations this year, the maternity hospital, which has been plagued by delays and cost overruns, remains unused despite the Belfast Trust taking possession of the facility in March of last year.

During the hearing, Philip McClay, director of health estates at the Department of Health, and David Porter, director of strategic development at the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, presented insights into the governance structures in place for the hospital's construction. They also discussed what lessons had been taken from the challenges faced with the maternity hospital that would now inform the build of the new children's hospital, recently announced and estimated to cost £671 million.

The new children’s hospital is set to be located adjacent to the maternity facility on the Royal Victoria Hospital site and will feature distinct water systems on each floor, a response to concerns raised by the single water system that contributed to the issues observed in the maternity hospital.

Alliance Party MLA Danny Donnelly sought an updated timeline for the maternity hospital's opening during the committee meeting but was informed by Porter that a multidisciplinary review meeting was scheduled for the following week, making it impossible to provide a revised timeline.

DUP MLA Diane Dodds expressed dissatisfaction with the performance of the Belfast Trust in managing significant health projects. She specifically questioned why interim chief executive Maureen Edwards was not present to address questions regarding the lessons learned from the maternity hospital's construction. During her remarks, Dodds stated, “I am underwhelmed by all of this," pointing to a series of troubled projects within the Trust, including critical care and acute mental health facilities alongside the maternity unit.

Fellow committee member, SDLP MLA Colin McGrath, voiced similar frustrations, likening the situation to a comedic "farce" akin to the television programme "The Thick Of It," and queried whether the cause of the pseudomonas outbreak had been pinpointed. In response, Porter acknowledged the complexities involved, stating, “I don’t think we can sit here and say we have identified a singular source, in all honesty.” He noted that while contributing factors were being assessed, the Trust had not yet determined a definitive cause. Steps are being taken to mitigate future risks, including keeping the water system dry for as long as possible before it becomes operational.

The overall sentiment from the committee members reflects significant concern regarding the Trust's management and oversight capabilities in the face of these ongoing issues, particularly as they relate to such critical healthcare infrastructure. As the investigation continues, the focus remains not only on the successful resolution of the maternity hospital's opening but also on ensuring that the new children's hospital avoids similar complications.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2024-07-18/belfasts-maternity-hospital-facing-delay-after-pseudomonas-discovered-in-water> - This article discusses the discovery of high levels of pseudomonas in the water systems of Belfast's new maternity hospital, corroborating claims about the delays attributed to this bacterial outbreak and the impact on the hospital's opening timeline.
* <https://www.bmj.com/content/344/bmj.e592> - This source details a previous pseudomonas outbreak in the neonatal unit of the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital in Belfast, highlighting the dangers associated with the bacteria, which supports the article's context on health risks related to the outbreak.
* <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/dup-northern-ireland-assembly-psa-northern-ireland-b2653878.html> - This report mentions that 459 water outlets in the new maternity hospital tested positive for pseudomonas, confirming the scale of the contamination issue discussed in the article regarding the hospital's safety and operational delays.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-67034874> - This article provides insights into the potential delays and issues faced by the Belfast Trust concerning the new maternity hospital's opening, reinforcing the article's claims about unforeseen setbacks attributed to the bacteria.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-66998769> - This source outlines the management concerns raised by local MLAs regarding the construction and oversight of health projects, echoing the frustrations expressed by politicians in the article about the Belfast Trust's performance.