

Legionnaires' Disease Fact Sheet

What is Legionnaires' disease?

Legionnaires' disease is a serious type of pneumonia (lung infection) caused by *Legionella* bacteria.

Common Sources of Infection

Legionella can be found naturally in freshwater environments (like lakes and streams), but generally only becomes a health concern when it grows and spreads in manmade plumbing structures (e.g., cooling towers, hot tubs, building water systems).

Transmission

The *Legionella* bacterium is spread by the release of small droplets of contaminated water into the air from air conditioning cooling towers, showers, misters, humidifiers, etc. To cause illness, infected water droplets must be inhaled (breathed in) by a susceptible person. Generally, the disease is not spread from person to person.

Signs & Symptoms

The signs and symptoms of Legionnaires' disease usually occur 2 to 14 days after coming in contact with *Legionella* and may include:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Fever
- Muscle aches
- Headache
- Diarrhea
- Nausea
- Confusion

Risk Factors

Most healthy people exposed to *Legionella* do not get sick. People at increased risk of getting sick are:

- People 50 years or older
- Current or former smokers
- People with cancer or underlying illnesses such as chronic lung disease (like COPD or emphysema), diabetes, liver disease, or kidney disease
- People with weak immune systems or who take drugs that weaken the immune system (like after a transplant operation or chemotherapy)

Treatment

Legionnaires' disease is treated with commonly available antibiotics.

Steps You Can Take to Protect Yourself

- Persons at particularly high risk for legionellosis may wish to avoid high risk locations.
- Persons concerned about legionellosis may wish to reduce their exposures to aerosols of water by such actions as:
 - Not showering. If tub bathing, fill the tub slowly and carefully to minimize aerosol production.
 - Avoid whirlpools and jetted tubs.
 - Drinking bottled water rather than filling a glass with tap water.

If you think that you might have Legionnaires' disease, contact your primary care provider immediately.