



LEGIONELLOSIS (Legionnaire's Disease, Pontiac Fever)

What is LEGIONELLOSIS?

Legionellosis is an infectious disease caused by bacteria called *Legionella*. The disease may take two forms. The more serious form, called Legionnaire's Disease, may develop into pneumonia. The less severe form is called Pontiac Fever. Cases of disease may occur throughout the year, but most cases occur in the summer and fall. This disease usually occurs as single cases but outbreaks have occurred.

Who gets legionellosis?

Anyone can get legionellosis. Individuals with weakened immune systems due to chronic diseases (such as diabetes, kidney failure or HIV infection) are at higher risk of contracting legionellosis. In addition, individuals with immune systems that have been altered by medications (such as steroids or chemotherapy) may get the disease more often. Smokers and heavy drinkers are also more prone to get legionellosis.

How is the disease spread?

People get Legionnaire's disease when they breathe in a mist or vapor (small droplets of water in the air) that has been contaminated with the bacteria. Person-to-person spread does not occur.

What are the symptoms of legionellosis?

The early symptoms of legionellosis may be flu-like with muscle aches, headache, fatigue and dry cough, followed by high fever, chills and occasional diarrhea. Temperatures commonly reach 102° – 105° Fahrenheit and chest X-rays often show pneumonia.

Where are the *Legionella* bacteria found?

Legionella bacteria are found naturally in the environment, usually water, and have been isolated from ponds, creeks, lakes and moist soil. They can also be found in many man-made environments such as hot tubs, hot water tanks, water-cooling towers, decorative fountains and soil at excavation sites. Because these organisms are so common and so rarely cause disease, testing environmental samples is not usually done unless more than one person becomes ill.

What is the treatment for legionellosis?

Antibiotics are usually effective in treating the disease.

When does public health investigate a case of legionellosis?

All cases are routinely investigated to confirm the diagnosis and rule out an outbreak. If an outbreak occurs, an investigation is conducted to look for a possible environmental source.