



LEGIONELLOSIS

What is legionellosis?

Legionellosis, or Legionnaire's disease, is a serious type of pneumonia caused by the bacteria called *Legionella*. *Legionella* bacteria are naturally found in freshwater environments like lakes and streams. The bacteria can become a health concern when they grow and spread in human-made water systems like showerheads, cooling towers, hot tubs, decorative fountains, and large complex plumbing systems.

Who gets legionellosis?

Most healthy people exposed to *Legionella* do not get sick. People at increased risk of getting sick are people over 50, current or former smokers, people with chronic lung disease, people with weak immune systems, people with cancer, and people with underlying health conditions.

How is legionellosis spread?

After *Legionella* grows in building water systems, water droplets containing the bacteria can spread small enough for people to breathe in and become infected. Less commonly, people can get sick from aspiration of drinking water containing *Legionella*.

What are the symptoms of legionellosis?

People who get sick after being exposed to *Legionella* can develop two different illnesses — Legionnaire's disease and Pontiac fever. Legionnaire's disease is similar to other types of pneumonia with symptoms that include cough, shortness of breath, fever, muscles aches, headache, diarrhea, nausea, and confusion. Pontiac fever, a milder infection than Legionnaire's disease, has primary symptoms of muscle aches and fever.

How soon do symptoms appear?

For Legionnaire's disease, symptoms usually begin between two to 14 days after exposure to the bacteria. For Pontiac fever, symptoms can show a few hours to three days after being exposed and last for less than a week.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

Exclusion is not necessary because typically there is no person-to-person transmission. Under very rare circumstances, it may be possible.

What is the treatment for legionellosis?

Legionnaire's requires treatment with antibiotics and supportive care. Pontiac fever will go away without requiring treatment.



Frequently Asked Questions

What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of legionellosis?

There are no vaccinations to prevent Legionnaire's disease. The key to prevent Legionnaire's disease and Pontiac fever is to reduce the risk of *Legionella* growth and spread. Building owners and managers are encouraged to develop water management programs to help maintain building water systems and implement controls for *Legionella* growth.

Legionella can also grow in windshield wiper fluid tank of a vehicle if the tank is filled with water. To prevent growth, use only windshield cleaner fluid and follow the vehicle manufacturer recommendations.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,
<https://www.cdc.gov/legionella/about/index.html>