

LEGIONELLA Fact Sheet

What is Legionella?

Legionella are bacteria which are found in natural and artificial water sources worldwide. They can cause two types of illness in humans: **Legionnaires' disease** and **Pontiac Fever**.

Legionnaires' disease is a serious lung infection which can lead to pneumonia. Pontiac fever is a milder illness which causes flu-like symptoms.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include: fever, chills, cough, headache, weakness, muscle aches and pains.

Legionnaires' disease: symptoms typically develop 5-6 days after exposure but can present anywhere from 2-10 days.

Pontiac Fever: symptoms commonly develop 24-48 hours after exposure, but can occur anywhere from 5-72 hours.

Who is at risk for Legionnaires' disease?

Legionnaires' disease is not a common disease and the risk of getting it is generally quite low. Most healthy people do not get Legionnaires' disease after being exposed.

Those people who are at an increased risk are:

- people 50 years of age and older
- smokers
- alcoholics
- people with diabetes
- people with COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), emphysema, or kidney disease
- people with weakened immune systems

How does a person get Legionnaires' disease?

Legionella found in natural water sources such as lakes, rivers, ponds and streams are typically at levels that are too low to cause disease in people. Cases of Legionnaires' disease have occurred in homes, commercial buildings, cruise ships, spas and health care facilities. The number of bacteria influences the risk for humans. There are certain conditions which promote the growth of these bacteria. They are:

- stagnant water
- warm water temperatures (between 20⁰ C and 50⁰ C)
- presence of biofilm, scale and sediment.

When contaminated water containing large quantities of *Legionella* is released into the air in the form of droplets, or mist, people may be exposed.

Legionnaires' disease is caused by breathing in those small droplets of water which are contaminated with *Legionella*. You can't catch Legionnaires' disease from someone else and you can't get someone else sick if you have it.

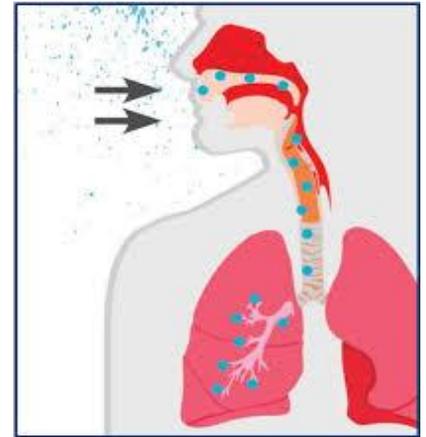
How is Legionella treated?

Legionnaires' disease can be successfully treated with antibiotics. People with risk factors listed above may have a longer recovery period.

Can I reduce my risk?

There are things that can be done to reduce your risk. In your home, ensure proper maintenance and cleaning of all mist-producing items such as shower heads, hot tubs, whirlpool tubs and humidifiers.

Where possible, avoid water temperatures between 25⁰ C and 45⁰ C to prevent growth of *Legionella*. Note: The WRHA follows a Legionella management plan.



Legionnaires' disease, a type of severe pneumonia, is caused by breathing in small droplets of water than contain *Legionella*.

Commons Sources of Infection

Outbreaks of Legionnaires' disease are often associated with large or complex water systems, like those found in hospitals, hotels, and cruise ships.

The most likely sources of infection include:



Water used for showering (potable water)



Cooling towers (parts of large air conditioning systems)



Decorative fountains



Hot tubs

NOTE: Tap water should not exceed 49⁰ C in order to avoid burning/scalding.

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References:

1. Legionellosis. Communicable Disease Management Protocol. Manitoba Health. (March 2015). Available at: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/protocol/legion.pdf>.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Legionnaires' Disease Fact Sheet. (July 2016). Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/legionella/downloads/fs-legionnaires.pdf>.
3. Legionella. Public Health Agency of Canada. (May 2015). Available at: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/id-mi/legionella-eng.php>.