

Legionellosis

1. What is legionellosis?

Legionellosis is a lung infection caused by *Legionella* bacteria (germs). The disease can range from a mild respiratory illness (Pontiac fever) to pneumonia (Legionnaires' disease). People with mild illness, can get better within 2-5 days without treatment. Legionnaires' disease can cause serious illness and needs treatment.

2. How do you get legionellosis?

People can get this disease by breathing in mist from a contaminated water source that is polluted with the bacteria. Some sources of infection include: air conditioning cooling towers, whirlpool spas, showers, and humidifiers. *Legionella* bacteria are commonly found in many types of water/plumbing systems and can grow to high numbers in warm, stagnant water. A person can be exposed to contaminated mists or vapors in many different places like homes, hotels, workplaces, hospitals, cruise ships, gyms or spas. Legionellosis does not spread from person to person.

3. What are the symptoms of legionellosis?

People with legionellosis can have some or all of the following symptoms:

- High fever
- Shortness of breath
- Muscle aches
- Chills
- Loss of appetite
- Diarrhea
- Tiredness
- Headache
- Cough

4. How is legionellosis treated?

Legionellosis is best treated when found and treated early. Mild illness, Pontiac fever, usually goes away on its own without treatment, and problems are not usually long term. More severe illness, Legionnaires' disease, can be treated with antibiotics and usually requires hospitalization. If you think that you have legionellosis, talk with your doctor about testing and treatment.

5. How can legionellosis be prevented?

There is no vaccine to prevent legionellosis. Most people exposed to *Legionella* bacteria will not get sick. People who are at higher risk for severe illness include the elderly, smokers, and patients with weak immune systems from diseases (like cancer, diabetes, and emphysema). Those at risk for severe illness may consider avoiding being in or around hot tubs and fountains. Large water systems in which *Legionella* can grow should be kept clean and maintained.



Key Points:

- Legionellosis is a lung infection that may occur after a person breathes in mist or vapors from a contaminated water source such as whirlpool spas, hot tubs, showers, hot water tanks, decorative fountains, and large plumbing systems.
- People who are most at risk for severe illness from legionellosis include the elderly, smokers, patients with chronic lung disease, and those with a weak immune system.

For more information:

Los Angeles County,
Department of Public Health
<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/>

California Department of
Public Health
www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo

Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention (CDC)
www.cdc.gov/diseasesconditions