



Legionnaires'

What is Legionnaires' Disease?

Legionnaires' disease is a very serious type of pneumonia (lung infection) caused by breathing in small droplets of water that contain bacteria called *Legionella*. Legionnaires' disease is not spread person-to-person.

How is Legionnaires' Disease spread?

In nature, *Legionella* live in fresh water and rarely cause illness. In man-made settings (air-conditioning cooling towers, hot water systems, humidifiers, hot tubs, respiratory equipment), *Legionella* can grow if water is not properly maintained. The source of infection can be related to contaminated water in the home, medical facilities, workplaces, hospitals or aerosol producing devices in public places. Outbreaks of Legionnaires' disease are often associated with large or complex water systems, like those found in hospitals, hotels, and cruise ships.

How is Legionnaires' Disease treated?

Legionnaires' disease is treated with antibiotics (drugs that kill bacteria in the body). Most people who get sick need care in a hospital but make a full recovery. However, about 1 out of 10 people who get Legionnaires' disease will die from the infection.

What should I do if I suspect exposure to Legionella bacteria?

Most healthy people do not get Legionnaires' disease after being exposed to *Legionella* bacteria. Certain risk factors can increase a person's chance of getting sick, including:

- Being a current or former smoker
- Having chronic lung disease, such as emphysema or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Having a weakened immune system from chronic diseases like cancer, diabetes, or kidney failure

- Taking medication that weakens your immune system

A person diagnosed with Legionnaires' disease in the workplace is not a threat to others who share office space or other areas with the infected person. However, if you believe your workplace is the source of the person's illness, be sure to notify your local health department.

How can Legionnaires' Disease be prevented?

- Cooling towers should be drained when not in use and cleaned periodically.
- Perform routine cultures of hospital water system, maintain hot water at highest temperature allowed by state regulations or chlorinate the water.
- Respiratory equipment should be rinsed with sterile water only.

Symptoms of Legionnaires' Disease:

Signs and symptoms of Legionnaires' disease can include:


- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Extreme exhaustion
- High fever (102°F - 105°F)
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

Symptoms usually begin 2-14 days after being exposed to the bacteria.

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CDC Public Information 
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