

Fact Sheet

Legionellosis

What is legionellosis?

Legionellosis is an infection caused by the bacterium *Legionella pneumophila*. The disease has two different forms:

- Legionnaires' disease, the more severe form of infection which includes pneumonia, and
- Pontiac fever, a milder illness.

The *Legionella* bacteria are found naturally in the environment, usually in water. The bacteria grow best in warm water (hot water tanks, humidifiers and plumbing systems such as showers and faucets).

How does a person get legionellosis?

Legionellosis is not passed from person to person. People can become infected when they breathe in a mist or vapour (small droplets of water in the air) from a water source that has been contaminated with the bacteria. People may be exposed to these mists in homes, workplaces, hospitals or hotels during travel.

Who is at risk?

People at any age may get Legionnaire's disease; however it most commonly affects middle-aged adults and elders. People that smoke cigarettes or have chronic lung disease have an increased risk. People whose immune systems are weakened by illness (e.g., cancer, diabetes, AIDS) or medications are also at higher risk.

Pontiac fever most commonly occurs in people who are otherwise healthy.

What are the symptoms of legionellosis?

The symptoms of Legionnaire's disease may include

- fever,
- chills,
- dry cough,
- muscle aches,
- headache,
- loss of appetite,
- diarrhea
- pneumonia

Symptoms of Pontiac fever may include all of the above,, but the symptoms are often milder and does not include pneumonia.

What is the treatment?

Antibiotics are used to treat Legionnaire's disease, and in some cases patients may need hospitalization.. People with Pontiac fever usually do not need any treatment and will feel better in 2 to 5 days.