

Legionellosis General Information

What is legionellosis?

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

- Legionnaires' disease – more severe form, includes pneumonia
- Pontiac fever – milder illness

The source of most infections is breathing the mist from a contaminated water source – air conditioning cooling towers, whirlpool spas, showers. Exposure can occur in homes, workplaces, hospitals, or public places. Legionellosis is not passed from person to person. Car air conditioners and household window air-conditioning units are not known to be sources of infection.

Who can get legionellosis?

Anyone exposed to the bacteria can get Legionnaires' disease, but the illness most often affects those middle-aged and older who smoke cigarettes or have chronic lung disease.

Other risk factors for Legionnaires' disease:

- those whose immune system is suppressed by diseases like cancer, kidney failure requiring dialysis, diabetes, or AIDS
- those who take drugs that suppress the immune system
- Healthy people are more likely to get the milder Pontiac fever if exposed to the bacterium.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of Legionnaires' disease may include:

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

Symptoms of Pontiac fever may include the symptoms above except for pneumonia.

What is the treatment?

For Legionnaires' disease, antibiotics are prescribed and hospitalization is often required. For Pontiac fever, people usually recover without treatment in 2 to 5 days.

How can you prevent legionellosis?

In your home, you can reduce the risk of infection by properly maintaining devices that produce mist – shower heads, hot tubs, whirlpool bathtubs, and humidifiers. Clean and disinfect these devices regularly, following the manufacturer's directions.

You can also keep your home water heater at a minimum of 60°C to help prevent the growth of *Legionella*. Take care that water at the tap cannot scald – so not more than 49°C .