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## Legionellosis Facts



### What is legionellosis?

Legionellosis is an infection caused by legionella bacteria. The disease can show in two different ways: Legionnaire's disease (the more severe pneumonic form) and a milder illness – Pontiac fever. Legionella bacteria are found naturally in the environment, usually in water. The bacteria grow best in warm water, such as in hot tubs, hot water tanks or parts of the air conditioning systems of large buildings.

### What causes legionellosis?

People can breathe in legionella in small droplets of water in air that has been contaminated with the bacteria. The bacteria are not spread from person-to-person.

### What are the symptoms of legionellosis?

Legionnaires' disease can have symptoms like many other forms of pneumonia, so it can be hard to diagnose at first. Signs of the disease can include: a high fever, chills, and a cough.

Some people may also have muscle aches and headaches. Symptoms of legionnaire's disease usually develop within two to ten days, most often within five to six days of exposure to the legionella bacteria. The symptoms of Pontiac Fever are fever and muscle aches without pneumonia; people generally recover from this within two to five days. Symptoms of Pontiac Fever usually develop within 5 to 66 hours of exposure, most often 24 to 48 hours.

Several laboratory tests can be used to diagnose legionellosis. The most common method is through urine testing.

### Who is most at risk for legionellosis?

People most at risk of getting sick from legionella bacteria are older people (usually 65 years of age and older) as well as people who smoke, or those who have a chronic lung disease, such as emphysema. People with weak immune systems, such as individuals with cancer or kidney failure, are also at higher risk.

## How is legionellosis treated?

Most cases can be treated successfully with antibiotics. Healthy people usually recover from the infection. Older people with other significant health problems may need further medical attention.

## How can I reduce the risk of legionellosis?

Avoiding smoking is the single most important thing you can do to lower your risk of infection.

Clean spas and hot tubs often and consider using tubs that do not have recirculation systems.

Tap water should not be used for respiratory therapy devices. Use sterile water for the therapy and for rinsing any type of equipment used for respiratory tract treatment.

Adapted from: Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, Ontario

