

Legionellosis

What is legionellosis?

Legionellosis is an infection caused by Legionella bacteria. Legionellosis can present as two different illnesses; Pontiac fever, a flu-like illness; and Legionnaires' Disease, the more severe form often involving pneumonia. Most cases occur as single person events, however, outbreaks have been noted. Legionella bacteria are found in natural and manmade water environments, and multiply in the presence of warm water temperatures (77° to 113° F).

Pontiac Fever	Legionnaires' Disease
Flu-like illness that goes away on its own	Flu-like illness that almost always requires antibiotic treatment
Lasts 2-5 Days	Can last from weeks to months
Takes about 48 hours to become sick from exposure	2 to 10 days to become sick from exposure but up to 16 days has been reported.
Symptoms are fever, chills, headache, malaise, and muscle pain	Symptoms are high fever, loss of appetite, headache, malaise and lethargy, muscle pain, diarrhea, and confusion. an initial mild cough, but as many as 50% of patients can present phlegm – sometimes with blood.
No deaths associated with Pontiac Fever	5-10% death rate

How common is legionellosis?

Cases of Legionnaires' disease have been on the rise since 2000, nationally. Almost 10,000 cases were reported in 2018.

Where are Legionella bacteria found?

Legionella can be found in any type of water system. They have been found in the environment in creeks, ponds, and potting soil. The bacteria are prevalent in warm stagnant water such as those found in most plumbing systems, hot water tanks, water in cooling towers, evaporative condensers of large air conditioning systems, and hot tubs.

How is legionellosis spread?

The disease is spread after inhaling mists from a water source that contains Legionella bacteria. This can happen in places like hot tubs, spas, and humidifiers. The disease cannot be spread from person-to-person.

Who gets legionellosis?

People of any age can get legionellosis, but the disease occurs most frequently in persons over 50 years of age. The disease most often affects those who smoke heavily, have chronic lung disease, or have underlying medical conditions that lower their immune system such as diabetes, cancer, or renal dysfunction. Persons taking certain drugs that lower their immune system, such as steroids, have an increased risk of being affected by legionellosis.