



Legionellosis

Fact Sheet

What is legionellosis?

It is a disease caused by *Legionella* bacteria. There are two different illnesses caused by these bacteria: Legionnaires' (LEE-juh-nares) disease and Pontiac fever. Legionnaires' disease is a serious type of pneumonia and Pontiac fever is usually a mild illness. Cases occur all year long, but both single cases and outbreaks occur more often in the summer and fall.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can include high fever, muscle aches, headache, loss of appetite, dry cough, stomach cramps and diarrhea. In cases of Legionnaires' disease, pneumonia can be seen on a chest x-ray. Symptoms usually begin 2-10 days after a person is infected with the bacteria.

Where are the bacteria found?

Legionella bacteria are found in many places in the environment. A common source is water. Outbreaks have been related to large water systems like air-conditioning cooling towers, fountains, showers, and hot tubs/whirlpool baths found in hotels, cruise ships, or hospitals. The bacteria also have been found in creeks, ponds, and wet soil.

How is it spread?

A person can become ill by breathing in small droplets of water or mist that contain the bacteria. It is not spread from one person to another.

How is it diagnosed and treated?

Chest x-rays can help diagnose pneumonia. Several tests to identify *Legionella* can be done on blood, urine, coughed up mucous, and lung tissue. It is usually treated with antibiotics.

Who gets it?

Anyone can get legionellosis but it is more common among the elderly and those who have a hard time fighting off illness. Smokers and people with other lung diseases are also at increased risk.

Is it a serious illness?

Legionellosis can be very serious. People with cancer, kidney failure, diabetes, HIV infection, chronic lung disease, or heart failure are more at risk of serious illness. People who are on steroids or chemotherapy also have a higher risk of serious illness. 5-30% of people with legionellosis die.

Can it be prevented?

Yes, actions can be taken to reduce exposure to the bacteria. Water systems should be maintained to reduce the risk. The bacteria are commonly found in the water so testing water sources is not recommended when individual cases occur.

Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center or visit:

Maine CDC:

<http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/airborne/legionellosis.shtm>

Federal CDC:

www.cdc.gov/legionella/index.html