

# Legionellosis

## Fact Sheet



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### What is legionellosis?

It is a disease caused by *Legionella* bacteria. There are two different illnesses caused by this bacteria: legionellosis which is more serious, and Pontiac Fever which is usually mild. Although cases occur all year long, both single cases and outbreaks occur more often in the summer and fall.

### What are the symptoms?

Persons often have flu-like symptoms with high fever, muscle aches, headache, loss of appetite, dry cough and some people have stomach cramps and diarrhea. Chest x-rays usually show pneumonia. Symptoms begin 2-10 days after a person is infected with the bacteria.

Persons with Pontiac Fever have fever, headache, weakness and muscle aches lasting for 2-5 days, and there is no pneumonia.

### Where are the bacteria found?

The bacteria are found in many places in the environment. A common source is water. Outbreaks have been related to contaminated air-conditioning cooling towers, not window air conditioners. The bacteria also have been found in hot and cold-water taps, showers, whirlpool baths, creeks, ponds, and wet soil.

### How is it spread?

A person can become ill by breathing in the bacteria, usually carried by mist. It is not spread from one person to another.

### How is it diagnosed and treated?

Tests are required to diagnose legionellosis. A number of different tests to identify *Legionella* can be done on blood, urine, coughed up mucous, and lung tissue. Legionellosis is usually treated with antibiotics.

### Who gets it?

Anyone can. It is more common among the elderly and those who have a hard time fighting off illness.

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### Is it a serious illness?

It can be for people over 50 years of age or smokers, or those who have a hard time fighting off illness. 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 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.

Useful websites:

MaineCDC:

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

Federal CDC: [www.cdc.gov/legionella/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/legionella/index.html)