

Legionellosis

(Legionnaires' Disease, Pontiac Fever)

What is Legionellosis?

Legionellosis is an infection caused by Legionella bacteria. The severity of the illness can be mild or result in pneumonia. Most cases occur as single, isolated events; however, outbreaks have been noted. There are 2 distinct forms of the disease: "Legionnaires' disease" and "Pontiac Fever".

Where is it found?

Legionella can be found in any type of water system. They have been found in the environment, in creeks and ponds, and potting soil. The bacteria are prevalent in warm stagnant water such as what is found in most plumbing systems, hot water tanks, water in cooling towers, evaporative condensers of large air conditioning systems and hot tubs. Home and automobile air conditioners are **not** a source of Legionella bacteria.

What are the symptoms of Legionellosis?

The early symptoms of Legionellosis include muscle aches, headache, tiredness, loss of appetite and coughing following by high fever, chills and occasionally diarrhea. In Legionnaires' disease, chest x-rays often show pneumonia.

The severity of Legionellosis can range from a mild respiratory illness (Pontiac Fever) to pneumonia (Legionnaires' disease). People with Pontiac fever generally recover in 2 to 5 days without treatment.

The period between exposure and onset of illness for Legionnaires' disease is 2 to 10 days, but most often is 5 to 6 days. For Pontiac Fever it is 5 to 66 hours, but most often is 24 to 48 hours.

How is it spread?

The disease cannot be spread from person-to-person. It is acquired after inhaling mists from a water source that contains Legionella bacteria.

The disease occurs most frequently in middle-aged adults and most often affects those who smoke heavily, have chronic lung disease or have underlying medical conditions that lower their immune system resistance to diseases such as diabetes, cancer or kidney dysfunction.

People taking certain drugs that lower their immune system resistance, such as steroids, have an increased risk of being affected by Legionellosis.