

LEGIONNAIRES' DISEASE

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What is Legionnaires' Disease?

Legionnaires' disease is caused by a type of bacteria called Legionella. Legionnaires' disease varies in severity from mild to severe pneumonia characterized by fever, cough and progressive respiratory illness.

How is it spread?

Legionella bacteria are found naturally in the environment, usually in water. The bacteria grow best in warm water, like the kind found in hot tubs, cooling towers, hot water tanks, large plumbing systems or part of air conditioning systems of large buildings. People get Legionnaires' disease when they breathe in a mist of vapor that has been contaminated with the bacteria. Outbreaks have occurred in hospitals, hotels and other large buildings as well as on cruise ships. Legionnaires' disease is not spread by person-to-person contact. Symptoms usually begin 2-14 days after exposure to the bacteria.

How is it treated?

Disease occurs most frequently in persons 65 years of age and older, as well as people who are smokers, those with suppressed immune systems, and those who have chronic illnesses such as diabetes, cancer, kidney failure and lung disease. Legionnaires' disease can be very serious and cause death in 5 to 30% of cases. However, most cases can be treated successfully with antibiotics and healthy people usually recover from the infection.

What should I do if I suspect exposure to the Legionella bacteria?

Most people exposed to the bacteria do not become ill. If you have reason to believe that you were exposed to the bacteria talk to your doctor and consult with your local health department.

A person diagnosed with Legionnaires' disease in the workplace is not a threat to others who share office space or other areas with the infected person. However, if you believe your workplace is the source of the person's illness, notify your local health department.

What measures can be taken to prevent Legionnaires' disease?

- Cooling towers should be drained when not in use and cleaned periodically.
- Perform routine cultures of hospital water system, maintain hot water at highest temperature allowed by state regulations or chlorinate the water.
- Respiratory equipment should be rinsed with sterile water only.

SYMPTOMS OF LEGIONNAIRES' DISEASE

- * Headache
- * Lack of appetite
- * Muscle aches
- * Extreme exhaustion
- * High fever
(102°F - 105°F)
- * Cough
- * Chills
- * Chest pain
- * Rapid or labored
breathing
- * Diarrhea
- * Abdominal pain

**LIVINGSTON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
2300 E. GRAND RIVER AVE., SUITE 102, HOWELL, MI 48843-7578
(517) 546-9850
www.lchd.org**