

LEGIONELLA INFORMATION

Legionella is a common bacterium found naturally in many different manmade and natural water environments. Legionnaires' disease, or Legionellosis, is a form of pneumonia resulting from inhalation of aerosolized water containing the Legionella bacterium. The bacteria survive and grow particularly well in manmade environments, where sediment and scaling are present and water flow is relatively stagnant. Growth may also be facilitated by the presence of certain other microorganisms capable of supporting intracellular growth of the organism.

In hospitals and other institutions, Legionella are found primarily in two locations: 1) potable hot water systems (defined as all building plumbing systems that distribute water for direct human contact, and 2) water in air-conditioning cooling towers. In hot water systems, concentrations of the bacterium are highest in biofilms within the system and at openings of water outlets. While data are limited, aerosolization and ingestion/aspiration of potable water from hot water systems are thought to represent the major routes by which the organism is transmitted to patients in nosocomial (hospital) Legionella cases each year.

What is Legionnaires' disease (Legionellosis)?

Legionellosis is a form of pneumonia caused by bacteria called *Legionella pneumophila*.

Who gets Legionellosis?

Anyone can get this disease. However, certain people are more likely to get Legionellosis. Individuals at higher risk include smokers, the elderly, those with lung or kidney disease, diabetes, cancer, and weakened immune systems because of diseases or medications.

How common is Legionellosis?

Each year, between 8,000 and 18,000 people are hospitalized in the United States with Legionnaires' disease, and most cases are sporadic.

How do you get Legionellosis?

The disease is spread by inhaling aerosols (mists) of water containing the bacteria. The disease is **not** spread from person to person.

What are the signs of Legionellosis?

Signs may include fever, cough, shortness of breath, pneumonia, chills, and body aches.

How do signs of Legionellosis appear?

Symptoms of the disease appear from two to ten days after coming in contact with the bacteria.

Is there a cure for Legionellosis?

Yes. Most cases of Legionellosis can be treated successfully with antibiotics. However, the disease can be potentially severe or fatal for the elderly and those with compromised immune systems or respiratory illness.

Why is the health department interested in cases of Legionellosis?

The health department would like to minimize the risk of infection to others in the community. Health care providers are asked to report all cases of Legionellosis to their local health department.

Where can I get more information?

You may contact the Allegany County Health Department at (301) 759-5093 (Communicable Disease Division) or (301) 759-5040 (Environmental Health) during normal business hours. You may also access more information on the Internet at www.cdc.gov/legionell/index.htm.