

What is Legionnaires' disease?

Legionnaire's disease is caused by a bacterium that causes two different illnesses. Legionnaire's disease is more severe, sometimes causing severe breathing difficulty or pneumonia. Pontiac fever is a more mild form, often causing a flu-like illness (see Pontiac fever fact sheet). Both of these syndromes tend to attack people who have weak immune systems.

What are the symptoms of an infection with Legionnaires' disease?

Persons with Legionnaires' disease usually have fever, chills, cough, body aches, headache, tiredness, loss of appetite, and occasionally diarrhea.

How soon do symptoms appear?

For Legionnaires' disease, it usually takes 2 - 10 days.

How is Legionnaires' disease spread?

Whirlpool outbreaks of Legionnaires' disease have occurred after persons have inhaled the fine spray (aerosols) that come from a water source (e.g., air conditioning cooling towers, spas, showers). Persons may be exposed to these aerosols in homes, workplaces, hospitals, or public places.

Who gets Legionnaires' disease?

People of any age may get Legionnaires' disease, but the illness most often affects males, especially middle-aged and older males, particularly those who smoke or have chronic lung disease. Also at increased risk are persons whose immune system is suppressed by diseases such as cancer, chronic renal failure, diabetes, or AIDS. Those that take drugs that suppress the immune system are also at higher risk.

How long is a person infectious?

You cannot get Legionnaires' disease from another person.

What is the treatment for Legionnaires' disease?

Antibiotics are used to treat Legionnaires' disease.

Do infected people need to be excluded from school, work, or child care?

No.

What can be done to help prevent the spread of Legionnaires' disease?

Improved design and maintenance of cooling towers and plumbing systems to limit the growth and aerosolization of *Legionella* organisms are the foundations of Legionnaires' disease prevention. During outbreaks, health department investigators seek to identify the source of disease transmission and recommend appropriate prevention and control measures, such as decontamination of a water source.