

DC 37 Safety & Health FACT SHEET

Public Health Strategies for *Legionella* Control



Legionnaires' disease is a type of pneumonia (lung infection) caused by a bacteria called *Legionella*. Legionnaires' disease is contracted by breathing in (inhaling) small droplets of water that contain the *Legionella* bacteria. Legionnaires' disease is not contagious and cannot be spread from person to person.

How does a person get Legionnaires' disease?

A person must be exposed to water contaminated with *Legionella* bacteria. This exposure may happen by inhaling or drinking water contaminated with the bacteria. There are numerous sources where *Legionella* bacteria can exist and grow. Some known sources are cooling towers, hot tubs, decorative fountains, showers, humidifiers and misters, pipes and drinking water.

Symptoms:

The symptoms associated with Legionnaires' disease include fever, chills, muscle aches, and cough. Additional symptoms include headache, fatigue, loss of appetite, confusion or diarrhea. The incubation period for symptoms to arise is 2 to 10 days.

Who's at risk?

If you experience any of these symptoms, contact your Primary Care Physician right away. People especially at risk are ages 50 and above, current or former smokers, those with underlying medical conditions such as lung disease, COPD, weakened immune systems or are taking medications that weaken the immune system.

DC 37 Safety & Health FACT SHEET

Can Legionnaires' disease be prevented?

Yes. Avoiding water conditions that allow the organism to grow to high levels is the best means of prevention. Specific preventive steps include:

- ⇒ **Water temperature control:** Store hot water at 140 degrees Fahrenheit or higher to kill the *Legionella* bacteria.
- ⇒ **Hot Water Delivery:** Ensure hot water is delivered at a minimum of 122 degrees to prevent *Legionella* bacteria growth in the plumbing.
- ⇒ **Cold Water:** Keep cold water below the *Legionella* growth range (77 degrees – 113 degrees).
- ⇒ **Stagnation:** Avoid stagnant water, as it allows *Legionella* to multiply and can lower disinfectant levels.
- ⇒ **Monitor Conditions:** It's important to monitor the temperature, disinfectant residuals, and pH of building water, and identify areas where water moves slowly.
- ⇒ **Promptly Address Issues:** Promptly addressing any identified issues can help reduce the risk of *Legionella* growth and spread within a building's water system.¹



Legionnaires' Disease Is Serious, but Can Be Treated

Legionnaires' disease is treated with antibiotics (drugs that kill bacteria in the body). Most people who get sick need care in a hospital but make a full recovery.² Legionnaires' disease is not contagious from person to person.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes only. Remember to seek professional medical help if one suspects being infected with *Legionella* or has questions.

¹ [ASHRAE Guideline 12](#) [Free read-only preview]

CDC toolkit: [Controlling *Legionella* in common sources of exposure](#)

CDC's [Legionella environmental assessment form marking guide](#)

² <https://www.cdc.gov/legionella>