



Legionellosis

1. What is legionellosis?

Legionellosis (pronounced Lee-juh-nel-o-sis) is a lung infection caused by bacteria (germs) called *Legionella pneumophila*.

The disease has two distinct forms:

Legionnaires' disease: which is the more severe form with pneumonia

Pontiac Fever: a milder illness without pneumonia

2. How do you get legionellosis?

Legionella germs are commonly found in many types of water/plumbing systems. They grow to high numbers in warm, stagnant water (90° - 105° F). Legionellosis may occur after a person breathes in mists or vapors from a water source (e.g., air conditioning cooling towers, whirlpool spas, showers, humidifiers) polluted with the germ. A person may be exposed to these mists or vapors in homes, hotels, workplaces, hospitals, cruise ships or other public places. The germ is not passed from person to person, and there is no proof of people becoming infected from car air conditioners or household window air conditioning units.

3. How do you know if you have legionellosis?

People with *Legionnaires' disease* can have some or all of the following symptoms:

Fever	Diarrhea
Tiredness	Muscle Aches
Chills	Headache
Loss of appetite	Cough (dry or may produce mucus)

Symptoms of *Legionnaires' disease* usually appear within two to 10 days after having contact with the germ. A person with *Pontiac fever* will have fever and muscle aches but not pneumonia. Symptoms of *Pontiac fever* usually appear within a few hours to three days, and usually clear after five days.

People who are most at risk of getting sick from legionellosis include the elderly, smokers, patients with chronic lung disease (like emphysema) and those with weak immune systems from diseases (like cancer, diabetes and kidney failure).

4. What are the serious health problems you can get from legionellosis?

The serious health problems you can get from legionellosis include respiratory failure, septic shock, and acute kidney failure. Respiratory failure occurs when the lungs cannot function properly. Septic shock is when a sudden drop of blood pressure lowers the flow of blood to vital organs, especially the brain and kidneys. Acute kidney failure is when the kidneys suddenly lose the ability to get rid of excess fluids and wastes from the blood.

5. How is legionellosis treated?

Legionellosis is best treated through **early** detection and intervention. *Legionnaire's disease* can be treated with antibiotics. *Pontiac fever* usually goes away on its own without treatment, and problems do not stay long term. If you think you have legionellosis, talk with your health care provider about testing and treatment.

6. How is legionellosis tested?

The most useful tests find signs of *legionella* in urine, blood tests, sputum or lung tissue. Sometimes, a chest X-ray or CT scan of the lungs may be needed for further analysis.

7. How can legionellosis be prevented?

Legionellosis can be prevented by improved design and upkeep of cooling towers and plumbing systems, and thorough cleaning and disinfecting of such water systems. Additionally, avoiding smoking can greatly reduce the risk of legionellosis infection.

Sources

1. *Legionellosis*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
http://www.cdc.gov/legionella/patient_facts.htm
2. *Legionellosis*. L.A. County Department of Public Health.
<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/>
3. *Legionellosis*. The Mayo Clinic.
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/legionnaires-disease/DS00853>