

Say No to Infection Legionella (Legionnaire's disease) Fact Sheet



What is Legionnaire's disease?

Legionnaires' disease is a potentially fatal form pneumonia. You can get the disease from inhaling droplets of water from things like air conditioning or hot tubs. It's uncommon but it can be very serious. Although everyone is susceptible to infection, with residents likely to be particularly vulnerable, water systems in care homes need careful consideration.

The people at most risk is:

- people over 45 years of age
- smokers and heavy drinkers
- people suffering from chronic respiratory or kidney disease
- diabetes, lung and heart disease
- anyone with an impaired immune system

How does Legionella bacteria spread?

Legionella bacteria are widespread in natural water systems, e.g., rivers and ponds. However, the conditions are rarely right for people to catch the disease from these sources. Outbreaks of the illness occur from exposure to legionella growing in purpose-built systems where water is maintained at a temperature high enough to encourage growth, e.g., cooling towers, evaporative condensers, hot and cold water systems, and spa pools used in all sorts of premises (work and domestic).

People contract Legionnaires' disease by inhaling small droplets of water (aerosols), suspended in the air, containing the bacteria.

Potential risk factors:

- The water temperature in all or some parts of the hot and cold water system may be between 20-45 °C, which is suitable for growth.
- It is possible for breathable water droplets to be created and dispersed e.g., aerosol created by a cooling tower, or water outlets.
- Water is stored and/or re-circulated.
- There are deposits that can support bacterial growth providing a source of nutrients for the organism e.g., rust, sludge, scale, organic matter and biofilms.

You can get Legionnaires' disease from things like:

- Air conditioning systems.
- Humidifiers.
- Spa pools and hot tubs.
- Taps and showers that are not used often.

You cannot usually get it from:

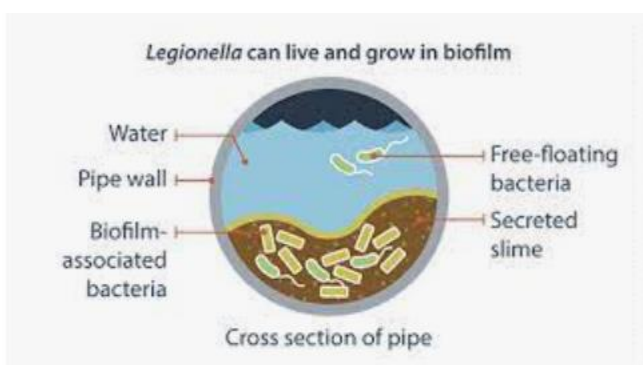
- Drinking water that contains the bacteria.
- Other people with the infection.
- Places like ponds, lakes, and rivers.

Control of Legionella in hot and cold water systems

Every healthcare setting must take suitable precautions to prevent or control the risk of exposure to legionella by having:

- an up-to-date legionella risk assessment.
- a written scheme of control in place.
- a schematic diagram of the hot and cold water system.
- Records of all necessary checks, tests and inspections, annual servicing, and cleaning of thermostatic mixing valves (TMVs).
- Quarterly descaling and disinfection of shower head, hoses and taps.
- Monthly temperature checks at the sentinel taps i.e., the flow and return temperatures at the calorifier, and outlets closest and furthest from the flow as well as a representative selection of points.

It is essential that routine flushing of unoccupied rooms or infrequently used outlets is undertaken with documentation to evidence this.



What are the symptoms of Legionnaires disease?

Symptoms of Legionnaire's disease include:

- A cough
- Difficulty breathing
- Chest pain
- A high temperature
- Flu-like symptoms

Treatment for Legionnaires' disease

Hospital admission may be needed with a diagnosis of Legionnaires disease.

Treatment in hospital may include:

- Antibiotics given directly into a vein.
- Oxygen through a face mask or tubes in your nose.
- A machine to help you breathe.

When you start to feel better you might be able to take antibiotic tablets at home. Antibiotic treatment usually lasts 1-3 weeks.

Most people make a full recovery, but it might take a few weeks to feel back to normal.

[Please click on the link to access more information on Legionnaire's disease.](#)

[Please click on the link for the Health & Safety Executive.](#)