

LEGIONELLOSIS

What is Legionellosis?

Legionellosis is a disease caused by bacteria called *Legionella*. These bacteria are found worldwide; including in New Brunswick. They live in the environment and can be found in both natural waters (such as ponds, lakes and streams), and in man-made water systems (such as air conditioners, cooling towers, whirlpools, spas and decorative fountains). Improperly maintained man-made water sources are often the cause of illness from *Legionella* bacteria.

What are the symptoms?

Legionella bacteria cause two types of illness: Legionnaire's disease and Pontiac fever. Both types of illness result in headache, fever, muscle pain, diarrhea and loss of appetite. People with Legionnaire's Disease often develop pneumonia and a cough requiring hospitalization. Those with Pontiac Fever have milder flu-like symptoms and will often recover in a few days without treatment.

How is Legionellosis spread?

Legionellosis is usually spread when the bacteria are present in an infected water source and fine mists of water from that source are inhaled. It is not spread person to person.

How is Legionellosis diagnosed?

Diagnosis of infection is based on assessment of clinical symptoms by a health care provider and laboratory samples from the lung, blood and urine to confirm diagnosis.

Who is at risk of Legionellosis?

Anyone exposed to the bacteria can become infected. Older persons, those with weakened immune systems or chronic diseases, travelers, smokers, alcoholics, and persons working with man-made water systems (such as maintenance workers on air conditioning systems) are at greater risk of developing the disease.

How can Legionellosis be prevented?

Proper maintenance of water systems. Regularly clean and disinfect mist producing devices such as shower heads, whirlpool spas, humidifiers and hot tubs. Use distilled water in respiratory therapy devices and clean regularly.

Adequate hot water storage. Maintain hot water at 50°C or warmer in hot water tanks. Install safety devices on taps to prevent burns.

How is Legionellosis treated?

Medications can be used to treat Legionnaire's Disease. People with Pontiac Fever will recover on their own without treatment.

What is the Public Health response?

Health care providers and laboratories are required to confidentially notify cases to Public Health. Public health staff may investigate to find out how the infection occurred, identify other people who may be at risk of infection, implement control measures, and provide advice as necessary.

Further Information

Please contact your health care provider, local Public Health office, or Telecare 811.