

## Legionnaires' Disease FAQ

### What is Legionnaires' disease?

Legionnaires' disease (LEE-juh-nares) is a type of pneumonia (lung infection) caused by a bacteria called *Legionella*. The bacteria got its name in 1976, when many people who went to a Philadelphia convention of the American Legion suffered from an outbreak of this disease.

Each year, between 8,000 and 18,000 people are hospitalized with Legionnaires' disease in the U.S. However, many infections are not diagnosed or reported, so this number may be higher. More illness is usually found in the summer and early fall, but it can happen any time of year.

### How do people get Legionnaires' disease?

People get Legionnaires' disease when they breathe in a mist or vapor (small droplets of water in the air) that has been contaminated with the *Legionella* bacteria. One example might be from breathing in the steam from a whirlpool spa that has not been properly cleaned and disinfected. **The bacteria are NOT spread from one person to another person.**

### Where do *Legionella* bacteria come from?

The *Legionella* bacteria are found naturally in the environment, usually in water. The bacteria grow best in warm water, like the kind found in hot tubs, cooling towers, hot water tanks, large plumbing systems, or parts of the air-conditioning systems of large buildings. They do not seem to grow in car or window air-conditioners.

### Who gets this disease?

People most at risk of getting sick from the bacteria are older people (usually 50 years of age or older), as well as people who are current or former smokers, or those who have a chronic lung disease (like emphysema).

People who have weak immune systems from diseases like cancer, diabetes, or kidney failure are also more likely to get sick from *Legionella* bacteria. People who take drugs to suppress (weaken) the immune system (like after a transplant operation or chemotherapy) are also at higher risk.

### What are the signs and symptoms of Legionnaires' disease?

Legionnaires' disease can have symptoms like many other forms of pneumonia, so it can be hard to diagnose at first. Signs of Legionnaires' disease can include:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- High fever
- Muscle aches
- Headaches

**How long does it take to get sick after being exposed?**

These symptoms usually begin 2 to 14 days after being exposed to the bacteria.

**How do you Treat Legionnaires' disease?**

Legionnaires' disease requires treatment with antibiotics (drugs that kill bacteria in the body), and most cases of Legionnaires' disease can be treated successfully with antibiotics. Healthy people usually get better after being sick with Legionnaires' disease, but hospitalization is often required. Legionnaires' disease can be very serious and can cause death in up to 5% to 30% of cases. Pontiac fever goes away without specific treatment. Antibiotics provide no benefit for a patient with Pontiac fever.

**Other Quick Facts:**

- There is no risk to being near the Hotel or using the public drinking water supply. Legionella is not transmitted through drinking water.
- DOH-Duval cannot test you or your home for legionella. If you suspect you are sick, see your physician.
- Legionella is NOT spread from person to person.
- There is no vaccine against legionella.