

## How do you get Legionnaires disease?

The disease is spread through the air from a water source. People become infected when they breathe in aerosols (tiny droplets of water) which have been contaminated with legionella bacteria. There is no evidence of spread from person to person.

## What is the treatment for Legionnaires disease?

There are several antibiotics available which are effective in treating the disease.

## Prevention of Legionnaires Disease in the hospital

It can be a significant problem if the bacteria is found in hospital water systems as there are many vulnerable people who potentially could be exposed to it.

## We take the following measures to reduce the risk to patients in our hospital:

- Maintenance and cleaning of water distribution systems
- Removal of water outlets not in use
- Ensuring water storage tanks are accessible for inspection and cleaning
- Flushing of outlets
- Cleaning and disinfection of showerheads
- Water sampling
- Water temperature regulation

## How can I contact a member of the Infection Prevention & Control Team?

Tell the Clinical Nurse Manager, doctor or nurse looking after you if you would like to speak to a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team and they will contact us.

We have made every possible effort to make sure that all the information provided in this leaflet is true, accurate, complete and up to date at the time of publication.

### Version 9

#### Reference :

**Health Protection Surveillance Centre(hpsc.ie)**

**National guidelines for the Control of Legionellosis in Ireland,2009**

**Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection from Water Systems in Healthcare Facilities , 2015**

MPINFEC006-05



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# Legionnaires Disease





## What is Legionnaires Disease ?

Legionella bacteria can cause two different types of infection grouped under the name of legionellosis. One called Pontiac fever is a self limiting influenza-like illness. The second called Legionnaires disease causes a severe and potentially fatal form of pneumonia.

## What are the signs and symptoms of Legionnaires Disease ?

The illness usually starts with a flu-like illness including fever, tiredness, headache, and muscle pains. This is followed by a dry cough and breathing difficulties which may progress to a severe pneumonia. Some people also develop diarrhoea or may become confused. Case fatality rate is 12 % of otherwise healthy people and may be higher in some groups of patients.

The incubation period is 2 to 10 days although longer periods have been reported. Symptoms usually appear 5 to 6 days after infection but may take longer.

## How common is Legionnaires Disease?

Legionnaires Disease is an uncommon but very serious disease. There are less than 20 cases reported every year in Ireland. However, it is thought that many more cases occur that are not diagnosed because Legionnaires disease is difficult to distinguish from other forms of pneumonia and specific laboratory tests have to be carried out to diagnose it.

## Who is most at risk?

All ages can be affected. However most cases occur in people who are over 40 years of age. Men are more at risk than women, as are smokers, those with excessive alcohol intake, and people with chronic illness or people whose immune system is weakened. Travel abroad is also an important risk factor.

If a patient has Legionnaires we may share that information with other hospitals, if there is a risk that s/he got the infection in another hospital. We will also inform public health doctors who will investigate the possible source of infection.

Pontiac fever is a mild form of Legionnaires disease. Symptoms include fever, chills, headache and muscle aches. It does not affect your lungs and patients usually recover spontaneously in 2-5 days.

## Where are Legionella bacteria found?

Legionella bacteria are found in many types of water systems. They multiply in warm, and stagnant water, such as can be found in air conditioning, cooling towers, certain plumbing systems especially showers, spa pools, decorative fountains, sprinklers and respiratory equipment.

Legionella have also been found in potting compost, particularly in warm countries.

