



Prevention of Legionnaires Disease in the Hospital

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

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



Reference:

Health Protection Surveillance Centre (hpsc.ie)

National guidelines for the Control of Legionellosis in Ireland,2009

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



PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

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.

For healthy people that get this illness the fatality rate is 12%, it can be higher in patients who are deemed vulnerable.

The incubation period is two to 10 days although longer periods have been reported. Symptoms usually appear five to six days after infection but may take longer. Every patient is different.

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 the infection was acquired 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 in two to five days

Where are Legionella bacteria found?

Legionella bacteria are found in many types of water systems. They multiply in warm, and stagnant water. The bacteria can be found in air conditioning units, 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.

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.

How common is Legionnaires Disease?

Legionnaires Disease is uncommon but a 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. Specific laboratory tests have to be carried out to diagnose it.

The incubation period is two to ten days!

