



Sarpy/Cass Department of Health & Wellness

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FACT SHEET

Legionellosis

Legionellosis (Legionnaire's Disease) is caused by a bacteria called *Legionella*. The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) first identified *Legionella pneumophila* in 1977 as the cause of an outbreak of pneumonia that caused 34 deaths at a 1976 American Legion Convention in Philadelphia. *L. pneumophila* had probably been the source of other pneumonia outbreaks, but because of the organism's slow growth and special growth requirements it delayed the discovery. It has been identified in North America, Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe and South America and more often in the summer and early fall. A milder form of the infection caused by the *Legionella* bacteria is known as Pontiac's Fever.

<http://www.cdc.gov/legionella/about/index.html>

- Symptoms:** Symptoms of legionella are similar to other types of pneumonia and it often looks the same on a chest x-ray. Specific tests are needed to determine if a case of pneumonia is Legionnaires' disease. Common symptoms include: Cough, shortness of breath, high fever, Muscle aches, and headaches. Once exposed symptoms can begin within 2-10 days, but if you were exposed watch for symptoms for about 2 weeks.
- Spread:** People get Legionnaire's Disease when they breathe in the mist or vapor droplets of water in the air which have been contaminated with the bacteria. Legionnaire's Disease cannot be spread from person to person.
- Incubation:** Symptoms usually begin 2 to 14 days after exposure to the bacteria.
- Contagious Period:** An infected person is not contagious to others.
- Precautions:** People with weakened immune systems from other illnesses such as cancer, diabetes, or kidney failure are at greater risk for this disease.
- Reportable:** Within seven days by the Provider or Laboratory to the state or local health department.
- Diagnosis and Treatment:** The physician will order a chest x-ray. Diagnosis may also be confirmed with a lung biopsy, a blood culture, and/or urine antigen test. Most people are treated with an antibiotic that will kill the bacteria. Some persons with Pontiac's Fever recover on their own without treatment.

Prevention:

The best way to prevent the spread *Legionella* is to test:

- hot tubs for bacteria
- make sure companies with large water tanks take precautions with water storage
- cooling towers in big companies should be regularly serviced
- parts of air conditioning systems in large companies should be regularly serviced
- water parks with misters should be regularly serviced

Please inform medical providers or public health officials if you have traveled in the last two weeks or have been on a cruise.