

## **Legionnaires' Disease Information**

**Legionnaires' disease is a kind of bacterial pneumonia**

First identified in 1976 in Philadelphia at an American Legion convention.

Cases have now been documented as far back as 1947.

The bacteria is called *Legionella pneumophila*.

There are at least 70 different "groups" of Legionella in the environment, but only some of them appear to sicken humans, usually group (or "serogroup") 1, 4 and 6.

Symptoms can occur 2 – 14 days after exposure.

**The illness caused by the bacteria may vary in severity**

*Legionnaires'* disease causes pneumonia that can sometimes be severe and lead to death.

Risk factors for more serious pneumonia are:

- Age over 50
- Smokers
- Diabetes
- Chronic lung disease, like COPD, emphysema or asthma
- Chronic kidney disease
- Cancer or immune problems

***Legionella* bacteria is common in the environment**

Naturally found in aqueous (water) environments like lakes and ponds but can grow in

air conditioning cooling towers, hot and cold water taps, showers, humidifiers, whirlpool spas, fountains, etc.

## **People get Legionnaires' disease from inhaling infected water particles**

The bacteria is released into the air in small droplets of contaminated water from air conditioning cooling towers, showers, misters, humidifiers, fast running water, etc.

To cause illness, infected water droplets must be inhaled (breathed in) by a susceptible person.

The disease is not spread from person to person.

## **Symptoms usually occur 2 to 14 days after coming in contact with *Legionella* and may include:**

- High fever
- Chills
- Dry cough
- Shortness of breath
- Muscle aches
- Diarrhea
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Abdominal pain

## **Legionnaires' disease is diagnosed by special tests**

Special urine, blood or tests of respiratory secretions can identify *Legionella*.

## **Legionnaires' disease is treated with antibiotics**

Many antibiotics treat the disease.

When detected early, most people are successfully treated.

Some people with chronic medical conditions are more likely to have complications (see above).

## **The health department investigates all Legionnaires' disease reports**