

# *Legionella*

## **What is *Legionella*?**

- *Legionella* is a bacterium that causes Legionnaires' disease and Pontiac Fever.
- *Legionella* is found naturally in the environment, usually in warm water.
- Most people with Legionnaires' disease will have pneumonia (lung infection) since the *Legionella* bacteria grow and thrive in the lungs.
- Pontiac fever is a milder infection that usually last 2-5 days and does not cause pneumonia.

## **What are *Legionella* disease symptoms?**

- *Legionella* disease symptoms may include:
  - Cough
  - Shortness of breath
  - High fever
  - Muscle aches
  - Headaches
- Symptoms begin 2 to 14 days after being exposed to the bacteria.

## **How does *Legionella* spread?**

- The bacteria grow best in warm water found in
  - Hot tubs
  - Cooling towers
  - Hot water tanks
  - Large plumbing systems
  - Decorative fountains
- People get *Legionella* when they breathe in contaminated mist or vapor, (small droplets of water in the air).
- *Legionella* is not spread person-to-person.



## Who is at risk for getting *Legionella* infection?

- Most healthy individuals do not become infected with *Legionella* bacteria after exposure.
- People at higher risk of becoming ill after exposure are:
  - Older people (usually 50 years of age or older)
  - Current or former smokers
  - Those with a chronic lung disease (like COPD or emphysema)
  - Those with a weak immune system from diseases like cancer, diabetes, or kidney failure
  - People who take drugs that suppress (weaken) the immune system, like after a transplant operation or chemotherapy.

## How can the spread of *Legionella* be stopped?

- The key to preventing Legionnaires' disease is facility maintenance of the water systems in which *Legionella* grows, including drinking water systems, hot tubs, decorative fountains, and cooling towers.
- Ensure water systems are kept at the appropriate water temperatures and chemically treated.
- Healthcare facilities, like hospitals and assisted living facilities should have a *Legionella* prevention plan that includes testing, and short-term and long-term remediation plans for the plumbing and hydrotherapy systems.
- Public places like hotels, casinos, and splash parks with water features, decorative pools, and hot tubs should have a recreational water treatment plan including regularly scheduled testing, cleaning, and treatment.
- There is no vaccine to prevent *Legionella*.
- Persons at increased risk of infection may choose to avoid high-risk exposures, like being in or near a hot tub or decorative fountains and breathing in the mist.

## Where can I find more information?

- Go to [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov) and type *Legionella* in SEARCH box.

