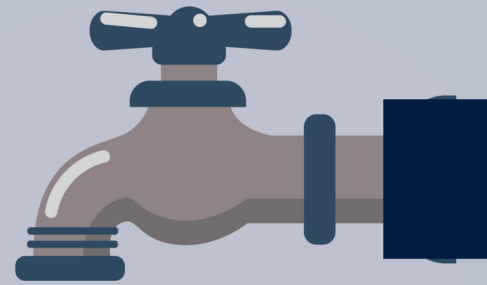


LEGIONNAIRES' DISEASE

Recognizing the Risk



Legionnaires' Disease is a serious lung infection caused by Legionella bacteria, which thrive in water systems. Understanding how it's spread—and who is most at risk—is the first step to prevention.

What is Legionnaires' Disease?

- Caused by Legionella bacteria
- First outbreak: 1976 at an American Legion convention
- Spread by breathing in contaminated water droplets or aspiration
- Common in large, poorly managed water systems

Symptoms of Legionnaires' Disease

- Cough, shortness of breath
- Fever, muscle aches, headache
- Serious lung infection (pneumonia is common)
- Appears 2–14 days after exposure
- ~10% mortality rate; higher in healthcare-acquired cases

Where Legionella Can Grow

- Showerheads and faucets
- Hydrotherapy tubs
- Ice machines
- Cooling towers (HVAC systems)
- Decorative fountains
- Medical equipment

Who's at Risk?

- Older adults
- People with weakened immune systems
- Those with COPD or emphysema
- Current or former smokers

LEGIONNAIRES' DISEASE

Prevention and Response

Legionella Prevention Starts with Water Management

CMS requires facilities to have a Legionella control plan

Water Management Program

1. Build a multidisciplinary team
2. Map out the water system
3. Identify risk areas for Legionella growth
4. Set and monitor control measures
5. Take corrective action when limits are not met
6. Document and communicate all activities
7. Evaluate the program's effectiveness

Sources: CMS Toolkit: Developing a Legionnaires' Disease Laboratory Response Plan

Preventive Actions

- Keep hot water hot enough to kill bacteria
- Maintain disinfectant levels
- Keep water flowing (avoid stagnation)
- Remove biofilm and corrosion in plumbing
- Maintain equipment that uses water (e.g., fountains, ice machines)

Proactive Monitoring

- Test pneumonia patients for Legionella (urine antigen + sputum culture)
- Track and report cases promptly
- Maintain high awareness in at-risk populations and seasons

If a Case Occurs...

1. Notify the local health department
2. Investigate the water system and patient's water exposure
3. Collect water samples
4. Review and revise the water management plan
5. Report additional cases if found
6. Collaborate with public health experts on prevention