

LEGIONELLA BACTERIA

Health Hazards

WHAT IS LEGIONELLA?

Legionella is a type of bacteria that occurs naturally in fresh water sources and soil, but can develop in man-made locations as well. Warm temperature is a crucial factor for the growth of Legionella bacteria. Examples of suitable environments for bacteria growth include:

- Hot tubs
- Cooling towers
- Hot water tanks
- Large plumbing systems
- Decorative fountains

Monitoring and chemically treating the water is an effective way to prevent this type of biological growth.

EXPOSURE AND TRANSMISSION

It is important to note that not all people who come in contact with the Legionella bacteria will become sick. Illness is most likely to occur if a high enough concentration of the bacteria is able to grow in a water source.

People can be exposed to the bacteria if mists or vapors containing the bacteria are inhaled. Legionella cannot be transmitted from person to person, and Legionnaires' disease is not contagious. In some cases, the bacteria can infect the lungs and cause pneumonia. If pneumonia develops due to infection with Legionella bacteria, then it is called Legionnaires' disease.

More Information

The following resources provide useful information on Legionella and Legionnaires' disease:

- [Legionella \(Legionnaires' Disease and Pontiac Fever\)](#) -- Center for Disease Control
- [Legionnaires' Disease](#) -- Occupational Safety & Health Administration
- [Legionellosis](#) -- Washington State Department of Health

Please report any suspected illness associated with a Legionella exposure using the [UW Online Accident Reporting System \(OARS\)](#).

For questions about Legionella bacteria, contact EH&S at 206.543.7262.



Cooling Tower

Legionella is known as an opportunistic bacteria and tends to infect individuals with a weakened immune system.

People most likely at risk of getting sick from exposure to Legionella include:

- People over 50 years in age
- Current or former smokers
- People with a chronic lung disease
- People with a weak immune system
- People who take drugs that weaken the immune system

If you believe your work area may be at risk for high levels of Legionella growth or exposure to aerosols containing Legionella, contact EH&S at 206.543.7262.