

Consult the [Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act](#) and its regulations for additional information on the duties of workplace parties.

## What are legionella?

Legionella are bacteria that live in water.

## What are the illnesses associated with exposure to legionella?

- **Legionnaires' disease** – an infection of the lungs and a severe form of pneumonia. Symptoms usually start within 5 to 6 days (can be from 2 to 10 days, and rarely as long as 21 days) after contact with the bacteria and include fever and chills, muscle aches, headache, cough, shortness of breath, weakness, diarrhea, loss of appetite and confusion.
- **Pontiac fever** – milder, influenza-like illness lasting about 1 to 3 days. Symptoms usually start within 1 to 2 days after contact with the bacteria and include a fever, headache, muscle aches and tiredness. Less often, there may be cough or nausea.<sup>1</sup>

## How is Legionnaires' disease spread?

Legionnaires' disease is usually spread by breathing in aerosolized (small droplets or mist) water and/or soil contaminated with large quantities of Legionella bacteria. Conditions in buildings that promote the growth of the bacteria may be found in:

- Cooling towers, such as those used in the air conditioning systems of large buildings;
- Whirlpool bathtubs, hot tubs, and public spas;
- Plumbing systems (including water heaters, faucets, and showers); and
- Humidifiers.

## Is Legionnaire's disease contagious?

Legionnaires' disease is not transmitted from person to person or from drinking contaminated tap water. People become infected by inhaling airborne particles containing legionella bacteria.

## What are the symptoms of Legionnaires' disease?

In addition to pneumonia, symptoms can include fever, cough, muscle pain and headache. Symptoms start within 2 to 14 days of infection and can last for several months.

## Is Legionnaires' disease treatable?

Legionnaires' disease is treatable with antibiotics.

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<sup>1</sup> [Ottawa Public Health – Legionellosis](#)

### **What should I do if I think I may have been exposed, or if I have some symptoms?**

Early symptoms include fever, chills, and a dry cough. If you think you may have symptoms of legionella exposure, you should complete an [Accident, Incident, Occupational Illness or Near Miss Form](#) and notify [Health and Wellness](#).

### **Who is at risk for Legionnaires' disease?**

The following persons are at greater risk for developing Legionnaires' disease: people over 40 years of age; smokers; alcoholics; people with chronic lung or kidney disease; people with diabetes; and people with weakened immune systems.

### **Where can I get more information?**

Contact the Office of the Chief Risk Officer at [sst-ohs@uOttawa.ca](mailto:sst-ohs@uOttawa.ca). Further information is available from the following resources:

- [Ottawa Public Health](#)
- [Public Health Ontario](#)
- [Public Health Ontario: Legionella: questions and answers, 2nd edition](#)
- [Government of Canada](#)
- [Centre for Disease Control and Prevention](#)