

Who is at risk?

Persons who develop the illness are usually over 50 years of age, smoke, or have other risk factors such as a chronic illness or suppressed immunity.

Men are twice as likely as women to get the disease. It does not seem to spread from person-to-person.

Do you require further information?

For further information contact:

- Your local doctor or practice nurse
- Your local Public Health Nurse
- Communicable Diseases at Community and Public Health



Other resources available on infectious illnesses:

- Norovirus
- Whooping cough
- Tuberculosis
- Campylobacter
- Salmonella
- Meningococcal Disease
- Viral Meningitis

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**Communicable Diseases
Community and Public Health**
(a division of the Canterbury District Health Board)
October 2011
Code/Reference: MED0063
Authorised By: Resource Approval Panel

Legionnaires' Disease (Legionellosis)



Canterbury

District Health Board

Te Poari Hauora o Waitaha

What is Legionnaires' Disease?

Legionnaires' Disease is a form of pneumonia caused by a bacteria called *Legionella*. This is an environmental organism which lives in moist conditions. Most cases of this disease have no common source association but outbreaks do occur.

What are the symptoms?

Legionnaires' Disease often begins with:

- Influenza-like symptoms
- Fever
- Muscle aches
- Headache

Affected people can also develop:

- A dry cough
- Abdominal pain
- Diarrhoea

Symptoms usually begin 2-10 days (usually 3-5 days) after being infected.

The effects of the illness may last for many weeks.

How is it caught?

Legionnaires' Disease is caught by inhaling airborne droplets contaminated by *Legionella* bacteria.

Airborne droplets may come from a variety of sources including:

- Air conditioning cooling towers
- Hot water systems (especially shower heads)
- Handling potting mix or compost
- Spa pools and decorative fountains



How is it treated?

Treatment is with antibiotics. It is highly desirable to receive treatment early as a delay in treatment may result in a worse outcome.

How is spread prevented?

To prevent Legionnaires' Disease in commercial buildings, ventilation and water systems need to be maintained according to industry standards.

In the home situation, hot water cylinders maintained above 60°C may reduce the risk. A mixing valve may be needed to reduce the water temperature at the tap to prevent scalding.

To prevent Legionnaires' Disease associated with gardening, the following precautions are recommended:

- Water gardens gently using low pressure to avoid creating airborne droplets from the water hitting the ground
- Open bags of composted products and potting mix slowly and away from the face
- Avoid working in unventilated spaces
- When potting plants, wet the soil to reduce dust
- Wash hands thoroughly after gardening and handling potting mix or compost

Some authorities suggest wearing a P2 dust-mask and gloves as they provide greater protection and are particularly recommended for people at increased risk.