



Central Michigan District Health Department
“Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities”

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Legionnaires’ Disease/Pneumonia and Pontiac Fever

What is Legionnaires’ Disease/Pneumonia and Pontiac Fever?

These are infections caused by a bacteria called legionellosis. Legionellosis is associated with two distinct illnesses. 1) Legionnaires’ Disease, which varies in severity from a mild to a severe, progressive infection with symptoms of fever, cough and pneumonia and 2) Pontiac Fever, a milder illness without pneumonia.

The incubation period for Legionnaires’ Disease is 2-10 days (most often 5 – 6 days) and Pontiac Fever 5-66 hours (most often 24 – 48 hours).

What are the symptoms?

Both of these illnesses are characterized by muscle aches, fever and headaches. Within a day, there is usually a rapidly rising fever with chills. Temperatures commonly reach 102-105 degrees Fahrenheit. In Legionnaires’ Disease, chest x-rays may show patchy areas of mucus which may progress to both lungs and cause respiratory failure. Pontiac Fever is not associated with pneumonia or death; patients recover from flu-like symptoms spontaneously in 2-5 days without treatment. These illnesses are found most commonly in the summer and fall, but cases occur throughout the year.

Where does the bacteria come from?

This disease is not transmitted person-to-person. Legionnaire’s Disease is acquired through inhalation of aerosolized water contaminated with the bacteria. Hot water systems and air conditioning cooling towers, evaporative condensers, potable water systems, whirlpool spas, humidifiers, and respiratory therapy equipment have been implicated; the organism has been isolated from water in these as well as hot and cold water taps and showers, and from creeks and ponds and the soil from their banks. The organism survives for months in tap or distilled water.

How can I protect against this bacteria?

Appropriate disinfection of cooling tower waters and adequate treatment of water supplies where sources have been implicated.