

Legionellosis



WHAT IS IT?

Legionellosis, a lung infection, is caused by *Legionella* spp. bacteria (which also can cause Pontiac fever, which is milder). The disease can progress to death in immunocompromised individuals, typically those over the age of 50 with a history of smoking and lung disease. The *Legionella* organism can grow in stagnant ambient water systems and be spread through water aerosols from fountains, air conditioning units, hot tubs, etc.

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

- **10,000** cases are estimated to occur annually in the US, with the numbers rising significantly in the past 20 years.
- **~10%** of legionellosis patients will die. Many will suffer long-term symptoms.
- **>\$800 million** has been estimated as the the lifetime economic burden of legionellosis.
- Medicaid and Medicare mandate that hospitals have water management teams and plans to manage legionellosis risks — or risk losing reimbursements.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS



Cough



Fever



Shortness of breath

WHAT DO I DO ABOUT IT?

Because legionellosis incidence is impacted by the levels of *Legionella* bacteria in the water source and its virulence:

1. Take steps to reduce *Legionella* growth & proliferation, such as that found in biofilms.
2. Know your building's water system. Consider engaging professionals with expertise in detecting and effectively managing *Legionella* risks.
3. Thoroughly flush water systems that have sat unused for long periods or are used infrequently.
4. Ensure your water system is properly designed. ASHRAE guidance, includes elements such as:
 - Avoid dead legs in pipes or other areas that can allow water to sit for an extended time.
 - Capture aerosols.
 - Treat water with heat and/or chemical disinfectants with claims against *Legionella* bacteria.
 - Incorporate turbulence to reduce biofilm formation.
5. Point-of-use filtration can also be used.

TAG Public Health Experts have the experience and expertise to help companies and institutions successfully integrate science-driven public health approaches into their business strategy.