

Legionellosis Information Sheet

Population Health Hawke's Bay District Health Board | 76 Wellesley Road, PO Box 447, Napier
Phone: 06 834 1815 | **Fax:** 06 834 1816 | **www.hawkesbay.health.nz**

What is it?

Legionellosis, (pronounced lee-jon-el-oh-sis) is a type of pneumonia (pronounced new-moan-eea) that is caused when your lungs are infected with *Legionella* bacteria. Legionellosis can also be called Legionnaires Disease.

Legionella bacteria are found naturally in our environment. There are different types of *Legionella*, some are found in soil and compost, and others in water systems.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Common symptoms include:

- Cough
- Finding it hard to breathe
- Fever (feeling hot or cold)
- Muscle aches
- Headaches
- You might also have vomiting or diarrhoea

Symptoms usually start 2-10 days after you have been infected, but can take as long as 14 days to appear.

As the symptoms of Legionellosis are similar to other diseases a doctor will need to do some tests to confirm if you have Legionellosis or something else.

How serious is it?

Some people can become very ill and end up in hospital. Rarely, people can die from Legionellosis.

Other people only develop a mild form of illness, called Pontiac fever.

Legionellosis is a notifiable disease under the Health Act. This means your doctor must tell the District Health Board if they think you have it. A Health Protection Officer will then contact you to talk about where you might have caught it from. They can also give you some advice about what to do to if it looks like you caught it from *Legionella* bacteria living in your hot water system or spa pool.

Who is most at risk?

Older people, smokers and ex-smokers, people with a chronic lung disease, and people with weakened immune systems are the most likely to become ill.

While anyone may be exposed to the *Legionella* bacteria, most people do not get sick.

How could I get infected?

You can be infected if *Legionella* bacteria get into your lungs. This can happen by breathing in dust or water droplets (spray or mist) contaminated with the *Legionella* bacteria from spa pools, soil, potting mixes and other compost products and warm-water systems.

Water droplets may also come from cooling towers on building, large commercial evaporation condensers or industrial cooling units. For this reason building owners and workplaces need to keep their systems maintained and checked in accordance with industry standards.

You cannot catch Legionellosis from drinking water, nor can you catch it from another person.

How do I protect myself and others?

Keep your hot water cylinder over 60°C

Keep your hot water cylinder over 60 degrees Celsius (60°C). The bacteria cannot survive in water hotter than 60°C.

However, this makes your tap water hot enough to burn the skin of a child and some adults. You will need to make sure children and elderly are kept safe. One way to do this is by getting a mixing valve (sometimes called a tempering valve) or other device installed which lowers the water temperature before it comes out the tap. Contact a plumber if you have concerns your hot water cylinder is too hot or cold.

Take care when gardening and potting plants

When gardening or potting plants there are a number of things you can do to protect yourself and others:

- Be careful when handling compost, potting mix and any form of soil or dirt. You want to avoid stirring up and inhaling any dust. Steps you can take include
 - opening bags of potting mix or compost slowly and away from the face,
 - slightly wetting the soil, potting mix or compost before use
 - wearing a dust mask that fits tightly over your nose and mouth
- Avoid working in unventilated spaces
- Water your garden gently with the water on low pressure. This prevents airborne droplets being created when the water hits the ground.

- Wash your hands thoroughly after working with soil, potting mix or compost.

Look after spa pools

If you have a spa pool make sure you keep it clean. Keep the water in the pool properly disinfected and at the right pH. Contact a specialist if you need advice.

Will I need to take time off work, school or preschool?

You can go back to work, school or preschool when you feel well enough to do so. There is no risk you will infect anyone else.

How is it treated?

The doctor looking after you will decide what antibiotics you need to take and how long for. If you are very sick you may need to spend time in hospital.

Where can I get further information?

For further information on Legionellosis please contact your doctor or Hawke's Bay District Health Board Population Health on (06) 834 1815. You can also phone Healthline on 0800 611 116 at any time of the day or night to speak to a registered nurse.