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Legionnaires' disease



**If you have any further questions,
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This leaflet contains information about Legionnaires' disease
- what it is and how it affects people

1 What is Legionnaires' disease?

Legionnaires' disease is a bacterial disease that may cause pneumonia. The majority of cases are reported as single (sporadic) cases but outbreaks can occur. The disease may have serious consequences for certain groups of people.

2 How do you get legionnaires' disease?

The bacteria causing legionnaires' disease exist naturally in the environment, but problems arise when they contaminate man-made water systems, such as cooling towers, hot and cold water supply systems in buildings, and spa pools and hot tubs.

Infection occurs when droplets contaminated with legionella are inhaled by the lungs. The disease is spread through the air from a contaminated water source. It cannot be spread from person to person.

Anyone can be affected by legionnaires' disease, but it is more common in men, people aged over 50 years, people with weakened immune systems and those who already have underlying lung conditions. Smoking is the most important risk factor.

3 What are the symptoms of legionnaires' disease?

The severity of the symptoms varies greatly, but include:

- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Headache
- Feeling generally unwell
- Tiredness
- Dry cough
- People may feel initially like they have the flu.

Other symptoms such as diarrhoea and vomiting can sometimes develop, along with blood-streaked phlegm, feelings of confusion and occasionally delirium.

If you have concerns about your health contact NHS Direct on 0845 4647, visit their website <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk>, or see your family doctor.

4 How long does it take for symptoms to develop?

It can take between two to ten days for the disease to develop. In rare cases, it can be as long as three weeks.

5 How is it treated?

People with legionnaires' disease always need antibiotic treatment. Appropriate antibiotic treatment has a good rate of success in treating the illness.

6 How is it prevented?

The UK has regulations which aim to ensure that water systems and those using water such as air conditioning systems do not harbour the bacteria which cause legionnaires' disease.

7 The Health Protection Agency and legionnaires' disease

We monitor outbreaks of legionnaires' disease and look for any patterns or trends which show possible connections between people who are affected. We provide advice on controlling outbreaks and work with colleagues in environmental health to track the source that has caused the illness, so that we can stop other people from becoming infected. We also work with colleagues in Europe in the control and investigation of cases of legionnaires' disease associated with holiday resorts abroad.

More information about the Health Protection Agency and legionnaires' disease is available on our website at <http://www.hpa.org.uk>.