



Information About Legionnaires' Disease and *Legionella* for Employees in a General Workplace Setting Served by Trenton Water Works

What is Legionnaires' disease?

Legionnaires' disease is a severe type of pneumonia (lung infection) caused by bacteria called *Legionella*. Legionnaires' disease can be treated with antibiotics; however, most people require care in a hospital.

What are the symptoms of Legionnaires' disease?

The usual symptoms may include cough, shortness of breath, chest pain, fever, muscle aches, and headaches, which are similar to symptoms caused by other respiratory infections, including COVID-19. Symptoms usually begin 2 to 14 days after being exposed to the bacteria.

Who is at risk for Legionnaires' disease?

Most healthy people exposed to *Legionella* bacteria do not become sick. People at increased risk of getting sick are:

- People 50 years or older
- Current or former smokers
- People with a chronic lung disease (like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or emphysema)
- People with weak immune systems or who take drugs that weaken the immune system (like after a transplant operation or chemotherapy)
- People with cancer
- People with underlying illnesses such as diabetes, kidney failure, or liver failure.

The risk of developing Legionnaires' disease increases with age, especially for individuals with chronic or underlying health conditions.

How do you get Legionnaires' disease?

People can get Legionnaires' disease when they breathe in aerosolized water (small droplets of water in the air) that contain *Legionella*. People can breathe in aerosolized water when using a shower or hot tub. Other sources can include decorative fountains and cooling towers (e.g., structures that contain water and a fan as part of centralized air-cooling systems for building or industrial processes). Vehicle air conditioning units do not use water to cool the air and are not a risk for exposure to *Legionella*. It is very unlikely that flushing a toilet will spread *Legionella*. Legionnaires' disease is generally not spread from person-to-person.

What should I do if I suspect that I have Legionnaires' disease?

It is important that anyone who thinks they have symptoms of Legionnaires' disease contact their health care provider and seek medical evaluation immediately. Legionnaires' disease can be deadly, but it is treatable with antibiotics.

Can I get Legionnaires' disease by drinking tap water from my building?

You cannot get Legionnaires' disease by drinking water or ice. The bacteria need to enter the lungs to cause infection. Less commonly, people who have swallowing difficulties (e.g., weak or impaired swallowing) can get sick by aspiration of drinking water containing *Legionella*. This happens when water or ice accidentally goes into the lungs ("goes down the wrong pipe").



If you are at risk for aspiration, you can consider drinking bottled water instead of tap water and avoid using ice made from the building's tap water.

Are there actions I can take to reduce my exposure to aerosolized water in my building?

Every building is different and may have unique features that can spread *Legionella*. For example, a building may have a decorative fountain in the lobby. Some buildings may need a Water Management Program ([cdc.gov/legionella/about/prevention.html](https://www.cdc.gov/legionella/about/prevention.html)) to reduce the risk for *Legionella* growing and spreading within their water system. If you have a specific question about your building, please contact your building manager.

If you are at increased risk for Legionnaires' disease (e.g., older age, immunocompromised), then consider limiting your exposures to aerosolized water if your building receives water from Trenton Water Works. For example:

- Fill the sink slowly to minimize water splashing when washing dishes in the workplace kitchen.
- Avoid using building sinks and showers to bathe or wash your face.
- Avoid spending time near any decorative fountains or other decorative water features.
- Never use tap water in any portable medical equipment that you may bring with you to the work.

What should I do if I cannot limit my exposure to aerosolized water at work?

Speak to your employer if your work duties involve being exposed to aerosolized water (e.g., power washing, dish washing, performing maintenance on the building water system) and if you are at increased risk for Legionnaires' disease. Wearing a half-face, air-purifying respirator equipped with an N95 filter may be needed. Please keep in mind, respirators must be used in accordance with a comprehensive respiratory protection program, which includes fit testing, training, and medical clearance. Many large buildings should have a Water Management Program.