

## Where does Legionnaires Disease come from ?

It is widespread in nature, mainly living in natural water systems, e.g. rivers and ponds.

Outbreaks of the illness occur from exposure to legionella growing in purpose built systems where the water is maintained at a temperature high enough to encourage growth e.g. cooling towers , evaporative condensers, spa pools and hot water systems used in all sorts of premises (work and domestic).

Most common outbreaks are linked to things such as air conditioning units, water features and jacuzzis which can spread droplets of water over a whole area. These are found as part of air conditioning and industrial cooling systems.

Fatal causes of Legionnaires Disease have also been associated with spa pool demonstrations.

## How can I contact a member of the Infection Prevention & Control Team?

Tell the Clinical Nurse Manager, doctor or nurse looking after you if you would like to speak to a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team and they will contact us.

The Infection Prevention and Control Nurses are available Monday to Friday 07.30am to 04.00pm.  
We are located in the Microbiology Department in the Laboratory on Level one.  
Telephone no.: 01 - 4143938

We have made every possible effort to make sure that all the information provided in this leaflet is true, accurate, complete and up to date at the time of publication.

**January 2012**

Reference : HPSC (Health Protection Surveillance Centre)

## Infection, Prevention & Control Patient/ Visitor/ Staff Information Leaflet

# Legionnaires Disease



## Infection Prevention & Control Team

THE ADELAIDE & MEATH  
HOSPITAL, DUBLIN  
INCORPORATING  
THE NATIONAL CHILDRENS  
HOSPITAL



## What is Legionnaires Disease ?

Legionnaires disease is a type of pneumonia caused by the bacteria *Legionella pneumophila* and other *Legionella species*.

## What are the signs and symptoms of Legionnaires Disease ?

The illness usually starts with a flu-like illness including fever, tiredness, headache, and muscle pains. This is followed by a dry cough and breathing difficulties which may progress to a severe pneumonia. Some people also develop diarrhoea or may become confused.

Death occurs in 10 – 15 % of otherwise healthy people and may be higher in some groups of patients.

The incubation period is 2 to 10 days although longer periods have been reported. Symptoms usually appear 5 to 6 days after infection but may take longer.



## How common is Legionnaires Disease ?

Legionnaires Disease is an uncommon but very serious disease.

There are less than 20 cases reported every year in Ireland.

However, it is thought that many more cases occur that are not diagnosed because Legionnaires disease is difficult to distinguish from other forms of pneumonia and specific laboratory tests have to be carried out to diagnose it.

## Who is most at risk ?

All ages can be affected. However most cases occur in people who are over 40 years of age. Men are more at risk than women, as are smokers, those with excessive alcohol intake, and people with chronic illness or people whose immune system is weakened. Travel abroad is also an important risk factor.

## Where are Legionella bacteria found ?

Legionella bacteria are found in many types of water systems. They multiply in warm, and stagnant water, such as can be found in air conditioning cooling towers, certain plumbing systems especially showers, spa pools, decorative fountains, sprinkles and nebulisers.

Legionella have also been found in potting compost, particularly in warm countries.

## How do you get Legionnaires disease ?

The disease is spread through the air from a water source. People become infected when they breathe in aerosols (tiny droplets of water) which have been contaminated with legionella bacteria. There is no evidence of spread from person to person.

## What is the treatment for Legionnaires disease ?

There are several antibiotics available which are effective in treating the disease.