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## Fast Facts

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- *Legionella* bacteria can cause Legionnaires' disease or Pontiac fever, collectively known as legionellosis.
- The bacterium was named after an outbreak in 1976, when many people who went to a Philadelphia convention of the American Legion suffered from this disease.
- An estimated 8,000 to 18,000 people are hospitalized with Legionnaires' disease each year in the U.S.
- *Legionella* bacteria are found naturally in the environment, usually in warm water.
- *Legionella* bacteria are not transmitted from person to person.
- People get Legionnaires' disease or Pontiac fever when they breathe in a mist or vapor (small droplets of water in the air) that has been contaminated with *Legionella* bacteria.
- Keeping *Legionella* bacteria out of water is the key to preventing infection.
- Most people with Legionnaires' disease will have pneumonia (lung infection) since the *Legionella* bacteria grow and thrive in the lungs.

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Content source: National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncird>), Division of Bacterial Diseases (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncird/dbd.html>)



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## Signs & Symptoms

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Español: [Signos y síntomas](#)

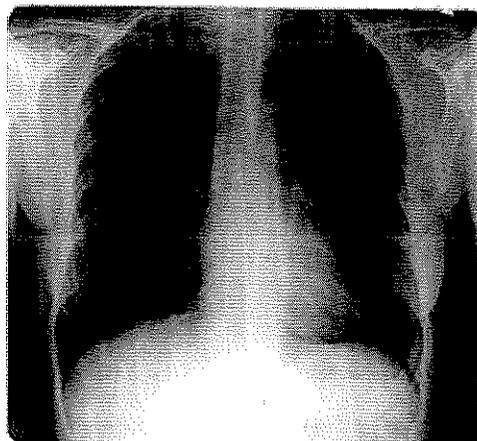
### Legionnaires' Disease

Legionnaires' disease can have symptoms like many other forms of pneumonia, so it can be hard to diagnose at first.

Signs of Legionnaires' disease can include:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- High fever
- Muscle aches
- Headaches

These symptoms usually begin 2 to 10 days after being exposed to the bacteria, but people should watch for symptoms for about 2 weeks after exposure.



### Pontiac Fever

A milder infection, also caused by *Legionella* bacteria, is called Pontiac fever. The symptoms of Pontiac fever are similar to those of Legionnaires' disease and usually last for 2 to 5 days. Pontiac fever is different from Legionnaires' disease because the patient does not have pneumonia.

Symptoms go away on their own without treatment.

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## Causes & Transmission

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Español: [Causas y transmisión](#)

### *Legionella* in the Environment

Legionnaires' disease (LEE-juh-nares) is caused by a type of bacteria called *Legionella*. The *Legionella* bacteria are found naturally in the environment, usually in water. The bacteria grow best in warm water, like the kind found in

- Hot tubs
- Cooling towers ([http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/other/industrial/cooling\\_towers.html](http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/other/industrial/cooling_towers.html))
- Hot water tanks
- Large plumbing systems
- Decorative fountains

They do not seem to grow in car or window air-conditioners.

### Spread of Disease

People get Legionnaires' disease when they breathe in a mist or vapor (small droplets of water in the air) containing the bacteria. One example might be from breathing in droplets sprayed from a hot tub that has not been properly cleaned and disinfected. The bacteria are not spread from one person to another person.



The bacteria are NOT spread from one person to another person.

## Exposure

Most people exposed to the bacteria do not become ill. If you have reason to believe you were exposed to the bacteria, talk to your doctor or local health department. Be sure to mention if you have traveled in the last two weeks.

A person diagnosed with Legionnaires' disease in the workplace is not a threat to others who share office space or other areas with him or her. However, if you believe that your workplace was the source of the person's illness, contact your local health department.

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### Related Pages

[Know the Facts About \*Legionella\* and Hot Tubs](#)

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