

## PATIENT INFORMATION

# Legionella / Legionnaires' Disease

### **What is Legionnaires' Disease?**

Legionnaires' Disease is caused by a bacteria (germ) called legionella, which may cause pneumonia. The majority of cases are reported as single cases. In England there are around 200 cases reported each year.

### **Where does it come from?**

Legionella bacteria can be found in water. They have been found in ponds, hot and cold water systems, (e.g. showers or fountains) and in water in air conditioning cooling systems.

### **How do I get it?**

Legionella is spread through the air from a water source. Person to person spread does not occur. Breathing in aerosols of water droplets from a contaminated water system is the most likely route of transmission.

Cigarette smoking, lung disease or excess alcohol intake increases a person's risk of contracting the disease.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Early symptoms are a 'flu-like' illness with aching muscles, tiredness, headaches, dry cough and fever (temperature). Sometimes diarrhoea and confusion may develop. Pneumonia may then develop from these symptoms.

## **Who gets Legionnaires' disease?**

All ages can be affected but it mainly affects people over 50 years of age and generally men more than women.

## **What is the incubation period?**

The time from contact with the bacteria to actual illness is usually 3 to 6 days, but can range from 2 to 10 days. In rare cases some people may develop symptoms up to three weeks after they are exposed to the bacteria.

## **Is there any treatment?**

Treatment for Legionnaires' Disease is with antibiotics.

## **How is it diagnosed?**

A quick diagnosis can be made by testing a sample of urine from the patient if they have the relevant symptoms.

## **What should I do if I think I have Legionnaires' disease?**

If you believe you have this infection you should tell your doctor so that the appropriate investigations can be started.

## **Are my family and friends at risk of Legionella?**

No, person to person spread is rare. Family and friends would only be at risk if they contracted Legionella from the same water source.

If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet, please contact:  
The Infection Control Support Department ☎ Tel. (01803) 655757 and speak to one  
of the Infection Control Nurses

---

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.