



Legionnaires' Disease Frequently Asked Questions

What is Legionnaires' disease?

Legionnaires' disease (or *Legionellosis*) is a type of pneumonia. It is caused by a type of bacteria (*Legionella*) that grows in warm water.

Is the disease contagious?

No. Legionnaires' disease is not spread from person to person. People only get sick by breathing in water vapor containing the bacteria (for example, by inhaling contaminated mist from faucets, showers, whirlpools or cooling towers). People who are sick cannot make others sick.

Who is at risk?

Groups at high risk include people who are middle-aged or older—especially cigarette smokers—people with chronic lung disease or weakened immune systems and people who take medicines that weaken their immune systems (immunosuppressive drugs).

What are the symptoms of Legionnaires' Disease?

Symptoms resemble other types of pneumonia and can include fever, chills, muscle aches and cough. Some people may also have headaches, fatigue, loss of appetite, confusion or diarrhea.

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

If you have symptoms such as fever, chills and cough, call a doctor and get checked for pneumonia. If you have a medical condition that affects your breathing, like emphysema, or if you are a smoker, ask your doctor about testing for Legionnaires' disease.

What is the treatment for Legionnaires' disease?

The disease is treated with antibiotics. Most people get better with early treatment, although they may need to be hospitalized. In rare cases, people may get very sick or even die from complications of the disease.



South Bronx Legionnaires' Disease Outbreak Frequently Asked Questions

What is the difference between a water tank and a cooling tower?

A *cooling tower* contains water and is used by some buildings as part of their air conditioning, ventilation and/or heating systems.

A *water tank* is a totally separate system. Some taller buildings use a water tank to store water used for drinking, washing dishes and/or showering. No water tanks are associated with the current South Bronx outbreak.

Is the tap water in the South Bronx safe to drink, wash and bathe with?

Yes. It is safe to drink, wash and bathe with the tap water in the South Bronx and throughout the city.

What has the Health Department done at the South Bronx buildings with cooling towers that tested positive for Legionella?

There are five South Bronx buildings with cooling towers that tested positive for Legionella. These buildings have completed short-term cleaning and disinfection. The Health Department remains in constant contact with management at all five buildings and is working very closely with management on long-term procedures to keep those cooling towers free of Legionella.

Is it safe for people to remain in the five buildings that tested positive for Legionella, especially if they continue to run their air conditioning systems?

Yes. All cooling towers have been disinfected. That process immediately reduces or eliminates the likelihood of Legionella being released.

Will the Health Commissioner issue an order for the entire South Bronx or the entire City requiring all buildings with cooling towers to disinfect and clean their cooling towers, regardless of whether the towers were inspected/tested for Legionella?

The City is evaluating whether a wide-scale cleaning and disinfection program would be appropriate. Currently, only five buildings have tested positive for Legionella. All five have undergone rapid disinfection and cleaning. We will continue to monitor the outbreak and evaluate whether additional steps are necessary.