

Legionnaires' Disease: Diagnosis and Treatment

Legionnaires' disease is a type of bacterial pneumonia that affects your lungs.

The bacteria comes from contaminated water sources.

Your lungs do an important job of pulling in oxygen-rich air your body needs and pushing out carbon dioxide and other harmful stuff your body doesn't need.

This all happens inside a complex system of bronchial tubes that connect to smaller tubes called bronchioles.

At the end of each bronchiole are tiny air sacs called alveoli. Each alveoli is wrapped in tiny blood vessels.

When you inhale or breathe in, oxygen moves out of the air sacs and into the blood vessels to send oxygen to your bloodstream throughout your body.

When you have Legionnaires, the bacteria is carried in contaminated water droplets that you breathe.

The bacteria travels deep into the lungs by entering the bronchial tubes and the bronchioles to infect the alveoli.

They fill with fluid and mucus. So your lungs have to work harder to deliver oxygen to the blood vessels; and breathing becomes more difficult.

Legionnaires' disease isn't contagious. The bacteria are **not** spread from one person to another person. You can get it again if you are exposed to the bacteria again.

Legionnaires' disease symptoms usually appear 2 days to 2 weeks after a person is exposed to the bacteria.

Common symptoms include: cough, fever, headaches, muscle aches, shortness of breath.

Legionnaires' disease is diagnosed by chest x-ray, urine and mucus tests.

Legionnaires' disease is treated with antibiotics.

If you believe you were exposed to Legionnaires' disease, talk to your doctor or local health department.

Be sure to tell them where you think you were exposed and if you have traveled in the last 2 weeks.

This information will help them correctly diagnose and treat the disease, locate the source of the bacteria, and prevent others from being exposed to it.