



# Central Michigan District Health Department

*Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities*



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## **Legionnaires' Disease/Pontiac Fever**

### **What is Legionnaires' Disease/Pontiac Fever?**

These are infections caused by a bacteria called legionellosis. Legionellosis is associated with two distinct illnesses. 1) Legionnaires' Disease, which varies in severity from a mild to a severe, progressive infection with symptoms of fever, cough, and pneumonia and 2) Pontiac Fever, a milder illness without pneumonia.

The incubation period for Legionnaires' Disease is 2-14 days and Pontiac Fever 3-72 hours.

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

Both illnesses are characterized by muscle aches and fever. Within a day, there is usually a rapidly rising fever with chills. In Legionnaires' Disease, chest x-rays may show patchy areas of mucous which may progress to both lungs and cause respiratory failure. Pontiac Fever is not associated with pneumonia or death.

### **How does the bacteria spread?**

This disease is not transmitted person-to-person. Legionnaire's Disease is acquired through inhalation of aerosolized water contaminated with the bacteria. Hot water systems and air conditioning cooling towers, evaporative condensers, potable water systems, whirlpool spas, humidifiers, and respiratory therapy equipment have been implicated. The organism has been isolated from water in these as well as hot and cold-water taps and showers, and from creeks and ponds and the soil from their banks.

### **What is the treatment?**

Using antibiotics to treat Legionnaire's Disease has a high success rate. Secondary issues related to Legionellosis are treated accordingly. With Pontiac Fever, patients recover from the flu-like symptoms spontaneously in 2-5 days without treatment.

### **How can I protect against these bacteria?**

By avoiding conditions that promote the growth of Legionellosis, you can protect yourself from these bacteria. Also, appropriate disinfection of cooling tower waters and adequate treatment of water supplies where sources have been implicated are effective measures.