

INSIGHTS

Legionnaires' Disease: How to Reduce Your Risk

Cause

Legionnaires' disease is caused by a type of bacteria called *Legionella*, found naturally in water-based environments. The Legionellosis infection develops in two distinct forms:

- Legionnaires' disease, resulting in pneumonia-like symptoms
- Pontiac fever, which is a milder version of the infection

In addition to its health concerns, Legionnaires' disease is a financial liability for property owners, investors and managers as well as commercial, hospitality, healthcare and residential real estate developers responsible for maintaining water systems. In fact, Disneyland was fined \$33,000 by the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration for improperly cleaning the cooling towers believed to be the cause of a 2017 outbreak which infected 21 people, with one fatality.

Exposure and Risk Factors

Legionnaires' disease is transmitted by breathing in aerosolized water containing bacteria, which is found in showers, hot tubs, cooling towers and hot water systems. Outbreaks occur when multiple people breathe in the same contaminated vapors (however, it is not contagious from person to person).

Prevention

There are no vaccines that can prevent Legionnaires' disease. The key to preventing the spread of the disease is to make sure that building owners and managers properly maintain building water systems in order to reduce the risk of *Legionella* growth and spread. Examples of building water systems that might grow and spread *Legionella* include:

- Hot tubs
- Hot water tanks and heaters
- Large plumbing systems
- Cooling towers (structures that contain water and a fan as part of centralized air cooling systems for building or industrial processes)
- Decorative fountains

Legionnaires' disease can be a costly, even deadly, liability for building owners and businesses responsible for maintaining any type of water system—even something as seemingly small as a decorative fountain.

Focusing on proper maintenance to ensure continuous, good water quality is the first line of defense against Legionnaires' disease. Other prevention tips include:

- Making sure employees use respirators or masks when working with commercial air conditioning or water treatment systems.
- Checking disinfectant and other chemical levels in hot tubs, water features and plumbing systems regularly and cleaning them according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
- If cases of Legionnaires' disease or Pontiac fever are linked to a hot tub, turn it off immediately. Take water samples for laboratory testing prior to disinfecting.

While implementing control measures to minimize the risk of *Legionella* spreading is key, it is also important to ensure you're adequately insured in the event of a claim. Alliant offers a wide array of environmental policy solutions that fit your business needs. For more information contact:

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