

Legionella infection

This leaflet offers more information Legionella. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

What is Legionella infection?

Legionella infection is also known as Legionnaires' disease and is caused by a bacteria called Legionella (full name Legionella pneumophila).

It is caught by inhaling small drops of water from a water system contaminated with Legionella. The incubation period (time from exposure to becoming unwell) is up to 14 days. Legionnaires' disease does not spread from person to person.

Symptoms include fever, cough, difficulty breathing, muscle aches, confusion and sometimes diarrhoea.

Legionella infection is rare and can be treated with antibiotics and treatment is usually for 10 to 14 days.

Some patients need to stay in hospital for treatment while others may be well enough to be treated at home.

Where does Legionella come from?

Legionella is common in nature and has been found in rain water, puddles, ponds and rivers, where it is harmless.

Outbreaks can happen when temperatures are warm enough to cause the growth of the bacteria in human water systems, such as whirlpool baths, cooling towers, air-conditioning, industrial cooling systems or the water systems in large buildings.

Legionnaires' disease has also been linked to contaminated showers and sprinkler systems but this is rare.

Sometimes hospital patients can become infected if they come into contact with water that contains Legionella.

What measures are there to control Legionnaires' disease?

Health and safety regulations require organisations to properly manage, maintain and treat their water systems to help prevent Legionnaires' disease. If an organisation has a cooling tower system this must be registered with the local authority or the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

If a hospital patient becomes infected with Legionella, what is done to find out how this has happened?

An investigation will try to find out how and where the infection happened to check that all required preventative measures have been taken and to prevent any more people becoming infected.

If the infection happened in the community the investigation is carried out by the local health protection team, part of Public Health England (PHE). A member of this team may call you or a relative or visit you in hospital or at home to ask some questions about possible exposure to water in the two weeks before you became unwell.

If you have been in hospital or visited one during these two weeks it's possible you caught the infection there. In this case the hospital Infection Prevention and Control team will also investigate.

The investigation normally involves a review of all the control measures in place and sometimes water samples need to be tested to look for Legionella. This could include water in the hospital or in your own home. If this is needed the Health Protection Team will contact you or a relative. Any sampling of the water in your home is normally done by an Environmental Health Officer from your local council so they will also contact you to arrange a time.

How long does the investigation take?

It can take several weeks to find out where the infection was acquired, because of the complicated nature of the investigation and the time needed for laboratory tests.

It can take up to 14 days for the initial tests and more may then be needed to see if any Legionella bacteria found are the same as the ones that caused the infection. These further tests can take several weeks.

If the hospital is identified as the likely source, action will be taken straight away to protect other patients and any patients with Legionella type symptoms will be tested.

Will I be informed of the results of the investigation?

Yes - the Health Protection Team or the Hospital Infection Prevention and Control team will be able to give you with the details if you would like to know.

Useful sources of information

NHS Choices:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/legionnaires-disease

Health and Safety Executive:

www.hse.gov.uk/legionnaires/what-is.htm

www.hse.gov.uk/healthservices/legionella.htm

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about Legionella infection, please contact the Hospital Infection Prevention and Control team on 020 8725 2459 (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30pm). Out of hours, please contact the on-call microbiologist via the switchboard: 020 8672 1255.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

