



# HEALTH ALERT

Gregory Cherpes, MD  
ODP Medical Director



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## BE ALERT FOR LEGIONELLA INFECTIONS

The Office of Developmental Programs is issuing this Health Alert to create a greater awareness of an anticipated **seasonal increase in Legionella infections** in order to promote prevention and help ensure recognition and timely treatment if infection does occur. The PA Department of Health recently released a Health Alert Network (HAN) announcement related to the increased risk of Legionella infections.

### Terms to Know:

- **Legionella** – A bacteria that can cause infections.
- **Legionnaire's disease** - A very serious type of pneumonia (Lung infection) caused by Legionella.

### Be Aware:

- Symptoms of Legionnaire's Disease include:
    - Cough
    - Shortness of breath
    - Muscle Aches
    - Headache
    - Fever
  - Legionella infection occurs when a person inhales aerosolized water containing the bacteria. Potential sources include cooling towers, whirlpool spas, showers, faucets, and decorative fountains. Patients may also be infected through aspiration of contaminated drinking water.
  - Water systems in buildings with low or no occupancy during the COVID-19 pandemic are at risk of being contaminated with Legionella which grows well in stagnant water. Buildings that reopened without thoroughly flushing and disinfecting their water systems or cleaning and maintaining other devices that use water (such as drinking fountains, ice machines, decorative fountains, or cooling towers) may expose individuals to the bacteria.
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- Legionella infections tend to be seasonal in Pennsylvania with most infections occurring in warm, humid and wet weather that occurs May through November.

### **Risk Factors associated with Legionella infections:**

- Male sex
- Age ≥50 years
- Current or past cigarette smoking
- Underlying conditions such as chronic lung disease, cancer, diabetes, renal disease, or immunocompromising conditions

### **Prevention:**

- Instructions for preparing water systems prior to reopening buildings were described in 2020 PA-HAN 507. CDC has also posted information on Legionella and building reopening on their website. ***See Resources listed below.***
- Although outbreaks of legionella infections can occur, person to person transmission has occurred only once.

### **Treatment of Legionella Infections:**

- Legionella infections must be treated by a health care practitioner. Diagnosis must be made with testing.
- Treatment will include antibiotics and may require hospitalization.

### **Where to Learn More:**

- PA DOH – [2021-PA HAN 579-06-28-ADV - Anticipated Increase in Legionellosis Cases Due to Seasonality and Increasing Building Occupancies](#)
- CDC - [Guidance for Reopening Buildings After Prolonged Shutdown or Reduced Operation | CDC](#)
- PA DOH - [2020-PAHAN-507-05-11-ALT-Restarting.pdf](#) , Preparing Water systems Prior to Reopening Buildings.
- CDC - [Legionnaires' Disease \(cdc.gov\)](#) -Informational handout