

Help protect seniors from exposure to Legionella.



According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), health departments reported about 6,100 cases of Legionnaires' disease in 2016.¹ However, because it is likely underdiagnosed, this number may underestimate the actual severity of the risk. While most healthy people may not get sick from exposure, senior living communities should take precautions to help protect their residents. Adults over 50, current or former smokers and those with weakened immune systems or chronic disease are among the high-risk population.

What is Legionnaires' disease?

Legionnaires' disease is a serious type of bacterial pneumonia transmitted by waterborne droplets or by aspiration of contaminated water. The contaminated water can enter a water system a variety of ways including during water main breaks, building construction or even changes in the quality of the municipal water. A water management program can help prevent these outbreaks when carefully maintained and monitored.

As a health care provider, you should also test for Legionnaires' disease in residents with pneumonia. Order a culture specific for Legionella from a lower respiratory specimen and a urinary antigen test, preferably before giving antibiotics.

Legionnaires' disease by the numbers²

25% of those who contract it from a health care facility are killed by Legionnaires'.

76% of locations reporting exposures were from health care facilities.

80% of problems leading to US health care-associated outbreaks could be prevented with effective water management.

Water management compliance.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) expects Medicare certified health care facilities to have water management policies and procedures to reduce the risk of growth and spread of Legionella and other opportunistic pathogens in building water systems. CMS will evaluate communities by reviewing policies, procedures and reports to verify that facilities:

- Complete a risk assessment
- Implement a water management program
- Specify and document testing protocols, control measures and corrective actions

Facilities that do not comply are at risk of citation with the CMS Conditions of Participation. Your program should validate the environmental controls you have in place and include clinical validation.



¹ "Legionella (Legionnaires' Disease and Pontiac Fever)," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [cdc.gov/legionella/fastfacts.html](https://www.cdc.gov/legionella/fastfacts.html) (downloaded Mar. 15, 2019).

² "Legionnaires' Disease A problem for health care facilities," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [cdc.gov/vitalsigns/pdf/2017-06-vitalsigns.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/pdf/2017-06-vitalsigns.pdf) (downloaded Mar. 15, 2019).

3 steps to get your safe water program in place.

STEP 1

Establish a team responsible for development and monitoring of the program. This can include employees involved with:

- Knowledge of accreditation standards and licensing requirements
- Expertise in infection prevention and/or infectious diseases
- Risk and quality management staff
- Building maintenance/engineering
- Housekeeping
- Occupational health
- Outside consultants such as plumber, HVAC, etc.

STEP 2

Conduct a risk assessment to examine areas that may provide a place for legionella and opportunistic pathogens to grow and spread such as:

- Emergency water systems (fire sprinklers)
- Cooling towers or evaporative condensers
- Ice machines
- Shower heads
- Whirlpool spas, hot tubs, hydrotherapy spas
- Decorative fountains, misters, water features
- Centralized humidification or any room humidifiers
- Medical devices (such as CPAP machines, bronchoscopes)
- On-site construction areas whether recent (six months) or ongoing

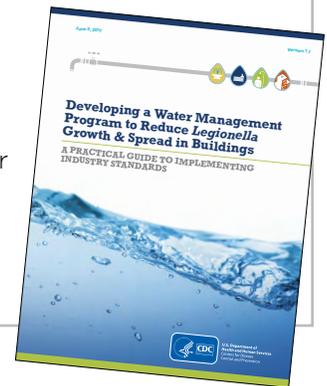
STEP 3

Develop a water management program according to your community's needs. Each building will have unique characteristics that require a tailor-made program.

- Create building schematics that describe the water system using a flow diagram and written description
- Determine the control measures needed for the areas identified in your risk assessment
 - Water temperatures (hot and cold) outside the ideal range for bacterial growth
 - Scald prevention
 - Water stagnation prevention – look for dead-legs in the system, flushing of the system
 - Adequate disinfection levels
 - Visual inspections
- Monitor all controls and document on an ongoing basis; if results are not within the program specifications, there should be plans in place to correct deficiencies
- Implement, review and update your program on a regular basis; periodic environmental and clinical samplings should occur to validate the program's effectiveness

Look to the CDC for help with your program.

The CDC offers a toolkit to help building owners and managers evaluate water systems and develop an effective water management program. To download the kit, go to: cdc.gov/legionella/WMPtoolkit



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For your risk management and safety needs, contact Nationwide Loss Control Services: 1-866-808-2101 or LCS@nationwide.com.