

### **What is Legionnaires' disease?**

Legionnaires' disease is a form of pneumonia caused by exposure to a bacterium called Legionella. This bacterium may be found in poorly maintained cooling towers and water systems.

### **How does a person get Legionnaires' disease?**

Legionnaires' disease is contracted by inhaling water mist contaminated with Legionella. The disease is not transmitted from person to person. You cannot get sick from drinking water contaminated with Legionella unless you accidentally inhale it. People with suppressed immune systems, lung problems, smokers and those who are middle-aged or older are at an increased risk of contracting the disease.

### **How serious is Legionnaires' disease?**

Legionnaires' disease is a serious illness that can cause death. The bacteria can also cause a mild illness called Pontiac fever. It is estimated that up to 25,000 people contract Legionnaires' disease in North America every year, but not all cases are reported so an exact number is unknown.

### **Can I get Legionnaires' disease from work?**

Yes, you can contract the disease anywhere that you are exposed to the Legionella bacteria.

### **How can Legionnaires' disease in the workplace be prevented?**

Legionnaires' disease is prevented by controlling Legionella bacteria. In general, this is done by following good maintenance practices for cooling towers and water systems. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control has a downloadable tool kit to help employers maintain water systems that are free of legionella bacteria called "Developing a Water Management Program to Reduce Legionella Growth & Spread in Buildings: A Practical Guide to Implementing Industry Standards." It is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/legionella/downloads/toolkit.pdf>

### **Do workplace OSHA standards apply to Legionnaires' disease?**

Yes. The OSHA general duty clause requires your employer to provide a workplace that is free from recognized hazards that are likely to cause death or serious physical harm. If your employer knows about a Legionella bacteria problem, they have an obligation to address the hazard appropriately.

### **Who can I call if I have questions about Legionnaires' disease?**

If you have questions about your risk for Legionnaires' disease, or if Legionella bacteria have been found in your workplace's water system, you can get more information at <https://www.osha.gov/dts/osta/otm/legionnaires/> or by contacting the USW Health, Safety and Environment Department.