

Legionella longbeachae Infection

Many different species of bacteria called *Legionella* are commonly found in the environment and some of these are known to cause illness in people. Infection by *Legionella* causes a disease known as legionellosis.

Legionella longbeachae generally infects the lung, causing pneumonia, which is a severe illness.

Symptoms of *Legionella* infection include:

- > fever
- > cough
- > chest pain
- > breathlessness
- > diarrhoea.

People of any age may be infected, but the disease is more common in middle aged and older people and people whose immune system is weak. Men are affected more frequently than women. Risk of infection is increased by:

- > smoking
- > chronic heart or lung disease
- > diabetes
- > kidney failure
- > some forms of cancer
- > immunosuppression, especially if on steroid medication
- > being 50 years or older.

Diagnosis is usually made by a series of blood tests. The bacteria may sometimes be grown from a sample of sputum or lung fluid, or detected using other special tests.

Legionella longbeachae can be found in potting mixes, compost heaps and composted animal manures. How *Legionella longbeachae* are spread is uncertain, but it is thought that they are breathed in or spread from hand to mouth. The bacteria can remain on hands contaminated by handling potting mix for periods of up to one hour. They can be readily removed from the hands by washing. *Legionella* infection cannot be caught from other people or animals. The risk of *Legionella* infection is not limited to gardeners, but the use of potting mixes, composts and other soils puts them at greater risk.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

2 – 10 days, usually 5 – 6 days.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

Person-to-person spread does not occur.

Treatment

Antibiotic treatment may be prescribed by the treating medical practitioner. Some cases may require admission to hospital.

Control of spread

- > To minimise the risk of exposure when handling garden mixes (bagged or unbagged) such as potting mix, mulches, composts and garden soils, gardeners should take the following precautions:
 - Read the warning on bagged mixes and follow the manufacturer's instructions.
 - Avoid inhaling airborne particles such as dust or mists.
 - Avoid hand-to-mouth contact.
 - Open bagged mixes in a well ventilated space.
 - Moisten the garden mix, avoiding the inhalation of airborne particles.
 - Always wash hands after using garden mixes, even if gloves have been worn.
 - Store bagged mixes in a cool dry place.
- > Additional measures that can be taken to reduce risk include wearing a face mask and gloves.



***Legionella longbeachae* infection is a notifiable disease**

Useful website

- > SA Health *Legionella* regulations, guidelines and fact sheets
<http://www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs/environmental-health-index.htm>