

Legionella Investigations

Why is Legionella investigated?

During outbreaks, CDC and health department investigators seek to identify the source of disease transmission and recommend appropriate prevention and control measures, such as decontamination of the water source. Current research will likely identify additional prevention strategies.

While there is not a prophylaxis available, this disease requires timely investigation in order to prevent additional cases from a source. Even if the patient dies, the pursuit of the investigation is necessary.

What forms are used?

All cases of Legionella should have a morbidity report form and then be investigated using the current CDC investigation form (1999) linked on this site. You are welcome to obtain additional information, but the core components of this form should be collected on each case in Utah. That allows for investigation of outbreaks across counties.

What is the incubation period?

Legionella has a 2-10 day incubation period. Risk factors should be identified for 2-10 days preceding disease onset.

How is Legionella transmitted?

Legionella is transmitted by inhaling water or soil aerosols that are contaminated with the Legionella bacteria. Legionella is not transmitted by drinking water nor through person-to-person spread..

Which risk factors are important?

The most important risk factors are those that may lead to additional cases if they are not identified and corrected. Examples are:

1. Nosocomia pneumonia. Probably the most important question on the investigation form is whether a person acquired Legionella as a result of a nosocomial infection. It is very important that this question be asked of the hospital infection control practitioner. It is also very important that this question is answered consistently, so that the data can be compared. See link on site.

Other risk factors worth exploring:

Do they work in a hospital or have they recently visited a hospital as an outpatient (identify the hospital)

Use of hot tubs, spas (identify where)

Recent travel history (especially on cruise ships)

Which grocery stores do they shop at (the vegetable misters may be implicated)?

Have they been to the dentist recently (had dental work using the high speed, water spray drills)?

Where do they work (in case there is a problem with the building ventilation system)?

Do they work in the plastic injection molding industry? (Legionella is known to affect people in this industry)

Do they work in outdoor construction (Things that cause soil disturbance)

Recent exposure to spraying fountains, especially those at water parks?

If during the summer, does their house have air conditioning or swamp cooling?

Have they recently opened a new bag of potting mix?