
SUBJECT: Legionellosis Prevention
Date: September 24, 2024
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To: Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement homes, Congregate Living Settings, Hospitals, University of Guelph
From: Dr. Nicola Mercer, Medical Officer of Health & CEO

The office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH) has shared a memorandum regarding legionellosis prevention and outbreaks (Attached).

Background: Legionellosis

Legionellosis, caused by *Legionella* bacteria, poses a significant health risk, especially in settings with vulnerable populations. *Legionella* bacteria can cause mild (Pontiac fever) or severe respiratory illness (Legionnaires' disease).

Legionella thrives in water systems, particularly where warm, stagnant water is present, making management and monitoring of these systems critical to preventing outbreaks.

Symptoms:

- Pontiac Fever – Anorexia, malaise, myalgia, headache, productive cough, temperature > 37.5 degrees Celsius (No Pneumonia)¹.
- Legionnaires' Disease – Anorexia, malaise, myalgia, headache, productive cough, temperature > 39 degrees Celsius, pneumonia, confusion, chills, nausea, diarrhea¹.

Key points:

- **High-Risk Period:** Legionellosis cases tend to spike between July and October. In 2023, Ontario had 336 confirmed cases of Legionellosis, with 238 cases occurring between July and October. Proactive measures should be taken during this period to mitigate risk.
- **Vulnerable Populations:** Residents and patients in healthcare settings are particularly susceptible to infection, as *Legionella* primarily spreads through inhalation of aerosolized water containing the bacteria.
- **Sources of Infection:** *Legionella* can grow in plumbing systems, cooling towers, hot tubs, showers and decorative fountains. Proper control measures are essential to inhibit the bacteria's growth.

What can you be doing:

1. Review attached OCMOH memorandum.
2. Review and update your water management plans to ensure control measures are effective.
3. Identify areas where stagnant water or conditions favourable to *Legionella* growth may exist and implement strategies to mitigate these risks.
4. Proactively protect residents by implementing industry standards mentioned in the memorandum:
 - ASHRAE Standard 188-2018 – Legionellosis: Risk Management for Building Water Systems
 - ASHRAE Standard 12-2023 – Managing the Risk of Legionellosis Associated with Building Water Systems

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5. Ensure residents, patients, and staff are monitored for symptoms of Legionellosis. Prompt diagnosis and treatment are essential for managing cases.
6. **Report any Legionellosis cases to Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health.**

Relevant Resources:

- [Public Health Ontario Legionella FAQ](#)
- [Public Health Ontario Webinar on Legionella in Healthcare Settings](#)

References:

1. Ministry of Health. Appendix 1: Case definitions and disease specific information – Legionellosis, May 2022. Available at: <https://files.ontario.ca/moh-ophs-legionellosis-en-2022.pdf>

For more information, please contact:

Name/Title: Shelby Leenders, Manager, Infection Control
Email: Shelby.leenders@wdgpublichealth.ca
Website: www.wdgpublichealth.ca