

# Pontiac Fever

## What is Pontiac fever?

- Pontiac fever is a mild, flu-like illness caused by exposure to *Legionella* bacteria.
- It is a less serious form of *Legionella*-related illness than Legionnaires' disease, which is a serious type of pneumonia (lung infection) caused by *Legionella* bacteria.
  - Pontiac fever does not involve pneumonia.
- Pontiac fever was named for the first recognized outbreak of the illness, in Pontiac, Michigan in 1968.

## How is it spread?

- Pontiac fever is spread by breathing in small water droplets in the air that contain *Legionella* bacteria.
- The bacteria present a risk to human health when they grow and then are spread by devices that create water mist such as:
  - hot tubs
  - showers
  - decorative fountains
  - cooling towers
- People can get sick if they breathe in small water droplets that contain the bacteria.
- Pontiac fever is not spread from person to person.

## What are the symptoms?

- The most common symptoms are:
  - Fever
  - Headache
  - Muscle aches
- Symptoms generally begin within a few hours to up to 3 days after exposure to *Legionella* bacteria.

## Who is at highest risk?

- Persons of any age can develop Pontiac fever.
- This is different than Legionnaires' disease, where older adults and persons with certain underlying medical conditions are at the highest risk for illness.

## How is it diagnosed?

- Pontiac fever is not commonly diagnosed or reported to MDH.
- Pontiac fever is typically diagnosed based on connection of illnesses in time or place during an outbreak investigation.
- Outbreaks of Legionnaires' disease can sometimes also include cases of Pontiac fever.
- Not usually diagnosed by laboratory testing.

## How is it treated?

- Pontiac fever generally resolves without any antibiotic treatment. Most people recover within a week.

## How is it prevented?

- Prevention of Pontiac fever involves the same steps as prevention of Legionnaires' disease.
- Depending on environmental conditions, *Legionella* organisms can multiply and spread from many types of human-made water systems such as hot tubs, showerheads, sink faucets, decorative fountains and water features, hot water tanks and heaters, large complex plumbing systems, and cooling towers (structures containing water and a fan as part of centralized cooling systems for buildings or industrial processes).
- Home and car air conditioning units do not use water to cool the air, so they are not a risk for *Legionella* growth.
- The key to preventing illness is to reduce the risk of *Legionella* growth and spread in building water systems and devices through good maintenance strategies. These strategies include monitoring water temperatures and disinfectant levels and preventing stagnant water conditions.
- Building owners and managers should develop and implement a water management program using ASHRAE (American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers) standards.

Minnesota Department of Health  
Waterborne Diseases Unit  
PO Box 64975  
St. Paul, MN 55164  
651-201-5414  
[health.water@state.mn.us](mailto:health.water@state.mn.us)  
[www.health.state.mn.us](http://www.health.state.mn.us)

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