



# Is your house a home to Legionella?

By Dan Howard  
for TRIB TOTAL MEDIA

You may be surprised to learn that you or someone you know may be fighting bout after bout of pneumonia caused by Legionella hiding in a shower head, humidifier or the hot water tank in their home.

Picture that someone has just sneezed on you. You see and then feel the tiny, insidious droplets floating in the air. The germ laden particles are surrounding you. There is no way to stop the yucky, aerosolized particles from marching across the room and infecting you. Fast forward to when you are in a shower or hot tub. Oh no! Your house just sneezed on you!

## LIKELY PLACES TO FIND LEGIONELLA

- Hot water tank
- Air conditioners (Central Air, window and automobile)
- Humidifiers
- Decorative fountains such as in a back yard, pond or public park
- Whirlpool spas
- Aquariums
- Sprays such as used over grocery store produce

Any water source that is below

117 degrees Fahrenheit and becomes aerosolized is a potential source for the transmission of Legionella and many other respiratory diseases. Your shower, faucet, pond, vaporizer, hot tub and air conditioner are just some of sources in your home that can “sneeze on you.” That warm relaxing shower when you breathe deep and the hot water mist loosens up that stuffy feeling in your nose is a great example where your house sends hidden germs right into your lungs and then your body.

## THE MYTH THAT LEGIONNAIRES DISEASE IS ONLY FOUND IN HOSPITALS AND HOTELS

We often hear about Legionella in hospitals, hotels and other public places. Legionella doesn't pack a suitcase and move into hotels and hospitals. Legionella and other bacteria can live in your home or anywhere else that the conditions are right.

The CDC reports that between 8,000 and 18,000 people are diagnosed and hospitalized with Legionnaires' disease in the U.S. Most legionella infected people will develop pneumonia. There is also a less serious illness caused by Legionella named Pontiac Fever. This milder version is flu like and lasts from 2 to 5 days. Though not as serious of a health risk as Legionnaire's Disease, being sick with anything like the flu should be avoided. The CDC warns in their fact sheet that “many infections are not diagnosed or reported.”

## METHODS OF AVOIDING LEGIONELLA DISEASE

- Keep hot water tank temperatures above 120.0 F
- Clean AC coils and the dirt areas of

window air conditioners

- Be careful to disinfect outdoor ponds
- Clean shower heads and spigot screens
- Avoid outdoor fountains and water attractions that spray water.
- Avoid hot tubs

## WHAT YOU DO NOT KNOW ABOUT YOUR HOT WATER TANK CAN MAKE YOU SICK

The temperature on your hot water tank may be turned down to save energy. You may remember the news stories suggesting that you should reduce the temperature in your hot water tank to avoid the chance of children or seniors scalding their hands.

Maybe you are going on vacation and saving the energy can help ease the pain of the cost of travel. Sometimes the hot water tank temperature is turned down because the home is vacant. What you probably do not know is that Legionella can live in a hot water tank set below 117 degrees Fahrenheit.

Hot water smelling like sulfur is an indicator that the tank is contaminated with bacteria, particularly when the cold water doesn't smell bad. The answer is to turn the temperature in your hot water tank to 120 degrees. The problem of the possibility of burning skin still exists, but changing spigots to ones with an anti-scald feature solves that problem.

## REASONS WHY MOST CASES ARE NOT DIAGNOSED

The persons most likely to contract Legionnaire's Disease are the same people at risk for other forms of pneumonia — smokers, seniors, those with other factors affecting immunity or those with respiratory

disease. Most people do not know the sources and risks for Legionnaires Disease and Pontiac Fever.

Treatment for the pneumonia is not affected by the cause. Testing for the Legionella bacterium in the patient is an additional cost which does not change the outcome for the patient. There is no incentive to test patients for the disease unless we are looking to the benefit of avoiding future infections.

## AVAILABLE TESTING METHODS

Real Time Screening for DNA can be done using ATP (DNA) Swab testing of shower heads and screens. This testing is a great screening tool. However, all it tells us is if the tested plumbing area has organic material on it. In other words, it identifies contaminations, but not the exact contaminant. It could be another bacterium or mold. The test does identify if additional testing should be performed.

Swab testing forwarded to an approved lab can provide definitive proof of the presence or absence of Legionella in the sample. This sample can be taken on plumbing fixtures, air conditioners, ponds and other spray systems

For a link to the KDKA TV News Story on Legionella featuring the author, go to: [www.EnviroSpect.info/](http://www.EnviroSpect.info/) Legionella. For qualified testing individuals, go to: [www.esaassociation.com](http://www.esaassociation.com)

Dan Howard is the owner of EnviroSpect. For environmental consultation call 724 443-6653. For more information visit their website at [www.EnviroSpect.info](http://www.EnviroSpect.info/) Email questions to: [Dan@EnviroSpectof-WesternPA.com](mailto:Dan@EnviroSpectof-WesternPA.com). Like us on Facebook or connect @DanHoward251.