

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
- breathlessness
- chest pain
- 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. Factors that increase your risk of legionellosis are:

- smoking
- emphysema
- diabetes
- some cancers
- immunosuppression, especially if on steroid medication
- being over 50 years of age.

Legionellosis is usually diagnosed 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 can't 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 infection when handling potting mix, gardeners should take the following precautions:
 - wear a face mask
 - open bag with care to avoid inhalation of airborne potting mix
 - moisten the contents to avoid creating dust
 - always wear gloves to avoid transferring the potting mix from hand to mouth
 - always wash hands after handling potting mix even if gloves had been worn.
- These same measures should be adopted when handling other garden material such as compost.

! *Legionella longbeachae* infection is a notifiable disease.

Useful website

- > Enjoy Gardening without the risk of *Legionella*
<http://www.dh.sa.gov.au/pehs/PDF-files/enjoy-gardening.pdf>