

### ***Legionella* Bacteria in Real Estate and Hospitality Business Properties**

Real Estate and Hospitality business property closures are a common occurrence due to plant closings, layoffs, strikes or slowdowns that may arise from a crisis, pandemic or when the economy takes a downturn leading to an increased susceptibility to bacteria and mold related exposures.

#### **What is Legionnaires' disease, and how does the infection spread?**

The Mayo Clinic describes Legionnaires' disease as a severe form of pneumonia. It is a lung inflammation caused by infection, which originates from a bacterium known as *legionella*. Most individuals catch Legionnaires' disease by inhaling the bacteria from water or soil. Those who are particularly susceptible to Legionnaires' disease include older adults, individuals who smoke and people with weakened immune systems.

The *legionella* bacterium also causes Pontiac fever, a milder illness resembling the flu. While Pontiac fever can clear up on its own, untreated Legionnaires' disease can be fatal. Many individuals become infected when they inhale microscopic water droplets containing *legionella* bacteria. The source can result from a shower spray, faucet or whirlpool, or water from the ventilation system in a large building. According to the Mayo Clinic, outbreaks have been linked to:

- Hot tubs and whirlpools
- Cooling towers in air conditioning systems
- Hot water tanks and heaters
- Decorative fountains
- Swimming pools
- Birthing pools
- Drinking water



When facilities that were once active are shut down and made inactive for periods of time, it creates ideal conditions for *legionella* bacteria to grow and thrive. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *legionella* can make individuals sick when bacteria grows in water and spreads in droplets small enough for people to inhale.

#### **Tips to Help Prevent *Legionella* in Real Estate and Hospitality Properties**

The causes of Legionnaires' disease as mentioned by the CDC can be preventable through water management programs. A water management program is a multi-step, continuous process designed to:

- Identify areas in a building where bacteria could grow and spread
- Reduce risk by managing and monitoring the water system



- Trigger action when risks are identified

Cooling Towers – When disinfectant levels are low, cooling tower fans can spray water containing *legionella*.

Unoccupied Floors – Low occupancy decreases water flow, which can decrease disinfectant levels and increase the risk of *legionella* growth.

Hot Tubs – If hot tubs are not well-maintained, the warm temperature supports growth of *legionella*, which can spread through water jets.

Water Supply Interruptions – Events that interrupt the delivery of municipal water to a building, such as nearby construction, can allow dirt to enter the system and use up disinfectant.

Decorative Fountains – *Legionella* can grow in warm areas of a fountain and splashing can spread water containing *legionella*.

The CDC has a free downloadable toolkit called *A Practical Guide to Implementing Industry Standards*, available on their website: <https://www.cdc.gov/legionella/wmp/toolkit/index.html>. The toolkit is designed to assist in developing a water management program to reduce *legionella* growth and spread in buildings.

### To Learn More:

Contact Everest's Risk Consulting Department at (800) 269-6660 or [losscontrol@everestire.com](mailto:losscontrol@everestire.com) for additional information.

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### Sources and Additional Resources

**Mayo Clinic:** <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/legionnaires-disease/symptoms-causes/syc-20351747>

**CDC:** <https://www.cdc.gov/legionella/wmp/hotel-owners-managers.html#steps-you-can-take>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/legionella/downloads/toolkit.pdf>

**OSHA:** <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/>

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