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Legionnaires' Disease **Is on the Rise**

It's summer, and the respiratory infection Legionnaires' disease is on the rise, thanks to high temperatures and moisture. Cases of this virulent and sometimes deadly bacterial infection are growing, with infection rates more than five times higher than in 2000. Why? For one thing, an aging population is more susceptible due to weakened immune systems. The bacteria usually are transmitted by breathing in water droplets from a water source that isn't properly maintained—such as the plumbing and HVAC systems in a hotel, cruise ship, hospital or nursing home.

Protect yourself at home...

Keep the hot-water-temperature dial set no lower than 120°F—high enough to prevent bacterial growth and low enough to prevent scalding.

Don't shut off water heaters when you go for extended trips. The water can stagnate and grow bacteria.

Change the water in your hot tub every three months or more often if heavily used. Follow the manufacturer's instructions regarding filter changes and use of chemical treatments.

Protect yourself on the road...

Responsibility for a facility's plumbing and HVAC system is out of your hands, but there are ways to protect yourself ...

Contact Passport Health for news of outbreaks in the region you're thinking of visiting. Consider an itinerary change if necessary.

Check for signs of rust, dirt or slime in public showers. If noted, tell management and do not use them.

If you plan to swim, pack pool test strips to make sure that the levels of chlorine, bromine and pH are in the safe range before you take a dip.

Symptoms of Legionnaires' disease mimic flu—fever, cough, muscle pain, shortness of breath, confusion and nausea. Don't ignore symptoms, especially if you've spent time in a large public facility within the 10 days prior to becoming ill. It requires treatment with specific antibiotics.

Article Source: Rowe, T. (2019, June). Legionnaires' Disease Is on the Rise. Bottom Line Personal, 10.



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