

# LEGIONELLA TESTING

Legionella bacteria is a naturally occurring bacteria typically found in lakes and rivers. At low concentrations, Legionella does not pose a health risk. However, certain industrial and residential settings offer a prime breeding ground which can seriously impact human health.

## HEALTH IMPACT

Legionnaire's disease is the name for the serious lung infection caused by the Legionella bacteria. This disease was first identified in 1976 when over 200 delegates became seriously ill while attending a Legion convention in Philadelphia. Symptoms included pneumonia, fever, muscle aches and shortness of breath. The vector turned out to be the hotel's air conditioning system that vented contaminated, moist air throughout the building. Sadly, 36 individuals died from this incident and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the US named the bacterial strain Legionella pneumophila following their investigation.

## HOW TO TEST?

Because Legionella is a commonly occurring bacteria, there is debate over the rationale and frequency for testing. No set numeric limit exists in Canada, but the US EPA has published a non-enforceable Maximum Contaminant Level Goal of zero for potable water. Public Health Ontario proposes routine testing be performed where conditions are favourable for outbreak, and with particular regard to facilities and workplaces involving populations at-risk (the elderly or those with compromised immunity) and workplaces with chronic exposure to environments conducive to growth.

The presence of Legionella itself does not necessarily cause Legionnaire's disease. Routine testing can help quantify if exposure thresholds are increasing. Research has found that water sampling yields more reliable results than swab testing.

## TESTMARK CAN HELP

Testmark offers Legionella testing. Contact us today for more information or to order a test kit to ensure correct sampling and return to the laboratory.

## WHO SHOULD TEST?

Legionella thrives in stagnant, warm (20 – 50 °C) water, and in biofilms. Typical settings include:



Stagnant puddles  
in at-depth mines



HVAC systems



Humidifiers



Cooling towers



Whirlpool baths



Plumbing  
systems

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