

INDEX 

Health and Safety Executive		Operational Circular	
		OC 255/10	
Review Date	04/12/2008	Open Government Status	Fully Open
Version No & Date	3: 22/08/2002	Author Unit/Section	FOD Health Unit

To
 AFQ Inspectors (Bands 0-4)
 SG Specialist Inspectors (Occ Hyg) (Bands 0-3)
 SG Medical and Occupational Health Inspectors Bands (1-3)
 HID Inspectors (Bands 0-3)
 Railway Inspectors (Bands 0-3)

LEGIONNAIRES' DISEASE: INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC

The appendix to this OC explains the basic facts about legionnaires' disease which can be used to form the basis of an information sheet for distribution to the public. The text of the OC itself gives details of how this might be done.

INTRODUCTION

1 Outbreaks of legionnaires' disease and other forms of legionellosis usually give rise to considerable public concern. Most people have heard of the disease but few know details of how it is caused and spread. This lack of knowledge can often exacerbate this concern.

2 The [Appendix](#) contains text which explains the basic facts. It is suitable for inclusion in an information sheet which could be distributed to both the general and working public in areas and workplaces within an outbreak zone.

ISSUE AND DISTRIBUTION

3 The information contained in the appendix can be issued either as an HSE publication alone or as the basis of a joint publication with any other public body represented on an outbreak committee (see [OC 255/12](#)) or by the outbreak committee as a whole. It can also be used to accompany a local press release.

4 Minor amendments and additions can be made to the text by using word processing software with the Intranet version (eg the insertion of a local contact telephone number for further information) but the main contents of the text must not be changed without prior agreement with FOD HU.

5 The text is suitable to be used by any organisation or person wishing to distribute it further under their own name. For mass distribution (eg door-to-door in a built-up area), it would be best for HSE to request a local authority to produce it. Alternatively the HSE Print Unit, Bootle, may be in a position to produce batches of around 1000 or more providing that sufficient notice is given.

6 The information can also be used during the investigation by HSE of single cases of legionnaires' disease for issue to the workforce of an affected workplace, or for wider distribution if thought necessary.

CANCELLATION OF INSTRUCTIONS

7 OC 255/10 version 2 - **cancel** and **destroy**.

Date first issued: 4 December 1998

(220/FOD/1031/1998)

Disc ref: J:\editors\intranet\operational\ocfiles\ 255_10.lwp



[Back to Main Document OC 255/10](#)APPENDIX
(paras 2 and 3)

INFORMATION ABOUT LEGIONNAIRES' DISEASE

What is legionnaires' disease?

1 Legionnaires' disease is a type of pneumonia. It was named after an outbreak of severe pneumonia which affected a meeting of the American Legion in 1976. It is an uncommon but serious disease.

2 The illness occurs more frequently in men than women. It usually affects middle-aged or elderly people and it more commonly affects smokers or people with other chest problems. Legionnaires' disease is uncommon in younger people and is very uncommon under the age of 20.

3 About half the cases of legionnaires' disease are caught abroad. The other half are the result of infections acquired in the UK.

How do people get it?

4 The germ which causes legionnaires' disease is a bacterium called *Legionella pneumophila*. People catch legionnaires' disease by inhaling small droplets of water suspended in the air which contain the Legionella bacterium. However, most people who are exposed to Legionella do not become ill.

5 Legionnaires' disease does **not** spread from person to person.

Where does it come from?

6 The bacterium which causes legionnaires' disease is widespread in nature. It mainly lives in water, for example ponds, where it does not usually cause problems. Outbreaks occur from purpose-built water systems where temperatures are warm enough to encourage growth of the bacteria, eg cooling towers, evaporative condensers, whirlpool spas (trade name Jacuzzis) and from water used for domestic purposes in buildings such as hotels.

7 Most community outbreaks in the UK have been linked to installations such as cooling towers or evaporative condensers which can spread droplets of water over a wide area. These are found as part of air-conditioning and industrial cooling systems.

What measures are there to control legionnaires' disease?

8 To prevent the occurrence of legionnaires' disease, companies which operate these systems must comply with regulations requiring them to manage, maintain and treat them properly. Amongst other things, this means that the water must be treated and the system cleaned regularly.

What are the symptoms?

9 The symptoms of legionnaires' disease are similar to the symptoms of the flu:

- (1) high temperature, feverishness and chills;
- (2) cough;
- (3) muscle pains;
- (4) headache; and leading on to pneumonia, very occasionally
- (5) diarrhoea and signs of mental confusion.

How is it treated?

10 The illness is treated with an antibiotic called erythromycin or a similar antibiotic.

What to do

11 If you develop the above symptoms and you are worried that it might be legionnaires' disease, see your general practitioner.

12 Because it is similar to the flu, it is not always easy to diagnose. A blood or urine test will be helpful in deciding whether an illness is or is not legionnaires' disease. When doctors are aware that the illness is present in the local community, they have a much better chance of diagnosing it earlier.

13 If you suspect that you may have got the illness as a consequence of your work then you are advised to report this to your manager, as well as your health and safety representative and occupational health department, if you have one. There is a legal requirement for employers to report cases of legionnaires' disease that may be acquired at their premises to the Health and Safety Executive.

December 1998 (updated August 2002)

