

# EMERGING ISSUE WITH HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES – LEGIONELLA, DEADLY WATER-BORNE BACTERIA!

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Why should we be concerned with preventing Legionella or Legionnaires disease? It has proven to be one of the most lethal illnesses with an estimated mortality rate of 5% - 30% for those infected according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC). In fact, the majority who survive the illness will undoubtedly receive extensive medical treatments with the possibility of life long health effects. According to the August 2019 Center for Disease Control Bulletin on Water Management Programs for Hotel Owners & Managers, we have seen the number of cases increase with the growth of recreational water facilities nationwide. Legionella Disease rates have increased nine-fold since 2000.

The Center for Disease Control on Legionella "Clinical Features" provides an understanding to the disease. A Legionella bacterium is a naturally occurring bacterium and found in water. One must inhale the bacteria

suspended in droplets where it becomes embedded into your lungs. The bacterium takes two to ten days for incubation before the onset of the respiratory disease. The resource indicates that Legionella bacteria enjoys warm water and a condition with no chemical treatment.

Specific to hotels, the Center for Disease Control published a technical paper "CDC Considerations for Hotel Owners & Managers: How to Prevent Legionnaires' disease." The most identified cases in hotels is generated from thermal spas and spa pools/hot tubs with little or no disinfectant treatment.

The mode of entry is also different than most other recreational water illness microbial. The transmission of Legionella takes place via aerosols. Thus, we see high risk with the untreated or low chemical treated waters in spas, hot tub and spa pools that have jets that aerosolize the water into the air. One does not typically get this type of infection from the use of a swimming pool, but we have seen cases that have been traced to swimming pool showers where the bacterium could harbor in the shower heads and become aerosolized. It is important to note that not all that are exposed to Legionella bacteria will suffer from Legionella Disease.

## PREVENTION BEGINS WITH UNDERSTANDING THE MANY RISKS OF EXPOSURE.

**Covid-19** – If you are one of the many hospitality businesses that has been closed for a period of time, standing or stagnant water can create the right conditions for the bacterium to proliferate. Take the necessary steps before re-opening to eliminate the risk of exposure.

**Pool Chemistry** – The Achilles heel for Legionella along with many other water borne organisms is proper water treatment and overall pool chemistry. Elevated water temperature makes it difficult to maintain the required disinfectant level. Tests should be completed at least twice a day and more often if the use is moderate to heavy.

**Safe Practices** – Hot tub/spa filters should be replaced routinely, follow manufacturer's recommendations. The biofilm accumulating on the walls of the unit should be removed before any accumulation can occur.

**Documentation** – It is important to complete all necessary pool chemistry testing and water pH levels based on use. Documentation could be reviewed by multiple regulatory agencies in event of an Incident. It bodes well to have the pool chemistry testing and water pH levels in order.

**Training** - Staff should understand the CDC Model Aquatic Health Code and the Pool & Spa Treatment Guidelines. They should know how one can become infected, the conditions leading to infection and most importantly, how to prevent the bacteria from contaminating the water.

Center for Disease has published several other "model" guidelines focused directly on preventing recreational waterborne illnesses such as Legionella. They include the CDC Model Aquatic Health Code, July 2018 which is currently a recommendation for anyone in the hospitality business, especially with any water features. For complete Building Systems, ASHRAE (American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers) Guideline 12-2000 and ASTM (American Standard & Testing Materials) Standard Guide D5952-08.

## WHAT IF I NEED ASSISTANCE?

For more information on Legionella prevention, contact your insurance agent/broker or call the Allianz Risk Consulting Help Desk toll-free at 1.888.527.6872.

## RESOURCES:

**CDC Waterborne Disease Outbreak Surveillance System, United States**

**CDC Model Aquatic Health Code July 2018**

<https://www.cdc.gov/mahc/editions/current.html>

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