



City of Phoenix  
WATER SERVICES DEPARTMENT

# Q&A Legionella

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**Background:** Chlorine used to disinfect Phoenix's tap water inactivates the Legionella bacteria. Tests show no indication that Phoenix's tap water contains any type of bacteria problem.

## 1. What is Legionnaire's Disease?

Legionnaire's disease, a type of pneumonia (lung infection), is contracted via inhalation of very fine mist particles containing Legionella bacteria. Legionella are bacteria naturally found in the environment, usually in water. The bacteria grow best in warm water, like the kind found in hot tubs, cooling towers, hot water tanks, large plumbing systems or parts of air-conditioning systems of large buildings.

## 2. Is Phoenix's tap water safe?

Yes, Phoenix water meets or exceeds all federal and state requirements for health and safety. Chlorine is used to disinfect your tap water. Chlorine inactivates the Legionella bacteria. (Over five million tests and measurements are performed each year in the water treatment and distribution systems. Phoenix's state of the art equipment and laboratories are used to test for more than 100 substances. Be assured that if water quality is ever an issue in Phoenix, customers will be notified.)

## 3. Is all of Phoenix's tap water disinfected?

Yes. Phoenix's entire water supply is safely disinfected with chlorine before being delivered to consumers. Using chlorine in water is one of the most widely used methods to safeguard drinking water. (Federal law requires a minimum chlorine disinfectant level of 0.2 parts per million in the water leaving a water treatment plant. However, Phoenix adds between 0.8 to 1.2 parts per million to ensure our water's safety.)

## 4. Does Phoenix's tap water have anything to do with a building's Legionella bacteria concern?

No. The chlorine used to disinfect Phoenix's tap water easily inactivates the Legionella bacteria. Tests for total coliform, which is an indicator of the presence of bacteria, show no indication that Phoenix's tap water contains any type of bacteria problem. (Once water enters a private property's piping system, it is the responsibility of building operators to monitor for the presence of Legionella bacteria. When the presence of Legionella is found in buildings, it is generally removed by disinfecting the building's piping system).

## 5. Who makes sure Phoenix water meets standards?

Water is one of the most heavily regulated industries in the nation. Phoenix submits hundreds of reports each year to the Environmental Protection Agency, the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality and the Maricopa County Environmental Services Department.

## **6. Who is at risk for Legionnaire's disease?**

People with compromised immune systems are at a higher risk for Legionella infection than healthy individuals. The people most at risk of getting sick from the bacteria are older people (usually 65 years of age or older), as well as people who are smokers or those who have a chronic lung disease, such as emphysema. Individuals with weak immune systems from diseases such as cancer, diabetes or kidney failure also are more likely to get sick from Legionella bacteria. People who take drugs to suppress the immune system after a transplant operation or chemotherapy are at higher risk, too.

## **7. Should I drink Phoenix's water if I have an immune system disorder?**

Although the city treats our water to meet or surpass all drinking water standards, some people may be more vulnerable to contaminants in drinking water than the general population. Immuno-compromised persons such as those undergoing chemotherapy, people who have undergone organ transplants, those with HIV/AIDS or other immune system disorders, some elderly people and infants can be particularly at risk from infections. These people should seek advice about drinking water from their health care providers. EPA and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines about appropriate means to lessen the risk of infection by microbial contaminants are available from the EPA Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 800-426-4791.

## **8. Do I need to use water filters at home to make my water safe?**

Since Phoenix water meets or exceeds standards, water filters are typically not necessary unless advised by your physician or desired as a personal choice. Bacteria growth can occur in improperly maintained water filters. If you choose to use filters on your tap, refrigerator, etc., be sure to change filters according to manufacturer's instructions.

## **9. Where else can I get information about water?**

Detailed information about the quality of Phoenix's water is available online at [phoenix.gov/water](http://phoenix.gov/water), where you'll find a copy of our annual Water Quality Report. The report also identifies monitoring and detected substances and provides information on contaminants. You also may call the EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline for information about the Safe Drinking Water Act or EPA's other drinking water programs at 800-426-4791.

Other websites that provide information about drinking water include:

- Centers for Disease Control – [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov) ([cdc.gov/legionella/patient\\_facts.htm](http://cdc.gov/legionella/patient_facts.htm))
- American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Engineers – [ashrae.org](http://ashrae.org)
- U.S. EPA – [epa.gov/ogwdw](http://epa.gov/ogwdw)
- American Water Works Association – [awwa.org](http://awwa.org)
- Arizona Department of Health Services – [azdhs.gov](http://azdhs.gov)
- Arizona Department of Environmental Quality – [azdeq.gov](http://azdeq.gov)
- Maricopa County Environmental Services Department – [maricopa.gov/envsvc](http://maricopa.gov/envsvc)
- Tap Into Quality – [tapintoquality.com](http://tapintoquality.com)