

*Safe Handling
of Potting Mixes,
Garden Soils
and Composts*





Potting mixes, composts and soils can be harmful to your health if you do not take some simple precautions.

A group of organisms, called Legionella, is found in these materials and can cause serious illness.

Legionella longbeachae is one species known to cause a type of pneumonia infection in humans. The information contained in this pamphlet will help you to avoid the disease.

Symptoms of Legionella infection?

Legionella infection usually develops 2 to 10 days after exposure and some or all of the following symptoms may be experienced:

- * fever*
- * chills*
- * a cough which may be dry or may produce sputum*
- * aching muscles*
- * headache*
- * tiredness*
- * loss of appetite*
- * diarrhoea*



It is always difficult to distinguish Legionella infection from other types of pneumonia by symptoms alone and other medical tests are required to diagnose the disease.

How to avoid Legionella infection?

Due to the widespread use of potting mixes, soils and other garden products, there is no guaranteed way of stopping infection. However, these simple precautions should be followed when handling such materials:

- * *Always wear gloves*
- * *Keep the mix damp while in use*
- * *Avoid inhaling the mix*
- * *Wash your hands thoroughly after use*



How serious is Legionella infection?

Legionella is a serious disease and it is recognised worldwide that the potential death rate of people who contract the disease is between 13% and 15%. It is a relatively simple infection to cure providing it is recognised and treated quickly by your doctor.

If treated quickly the effects of *Legionella* infection may be minor. However, the effects are dependent upon your age, health and the severity of the infection. Consequently the length of time taken to recover can vary greatly.

How is Legionella organism spread?

Recent studies in South Australia show that the most likely cause of transmission of *Legionella longbeachae* is from hand to mouth. It may also be possible that *Legionella* infection is contracted by breathing in fine particles of dust or water carrying the organism but this is not proven.

Unlike other micro-organisms *Legionella* infection is not contagious.

Who gets Legionella infection?

People of any age may be infected. However, the disease is opportunistic. It often affects middle aged and older persons and those whose immune system is weak. There is an increased risk of acquiring this disease if you smoke, have chronic lung disease, diabetes, HIV, or if you are on certain long term medication.

L. longbeachae infection is not limited to gardeners but the use of potting mixes, composts and other soils put them at greater risk.

Can I be infected by Legionella more than once?

Tests show that your body is able to develop immunity against a second infection but how long immunity lasts is unknown. It is, therefore, important to take care at all times.

Can the growth of Legionella organisms be prevented?

Legionella micro-organisms occur naturally and are widespread in the environment. There is no known way of preventing *L. longbeachae* from multiplying in composted bark, saw dusts, plant and vegetable materials, or other finished potting mixes and garden soils.





*When working in your
garden, remember...*

Always wear gloves

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Keep the mix damp while in use

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Avoid inhaling the mix

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*Wash your hands thoroughly
after use*

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Further information

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or

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