

Controlling the Risk of Legionella

Advice for households



■ What is Legionella and Legionnaires' disease?

Legionnaires' disease is a severe form of pneumonia (a bacterial respiratory infection) caused by Legionella bacteria. In low numbers, this bacteria can be found in natural water resources such as lakes, rivers and reservoirs. Legionella may also be present in water environments and poorly maintained artificial water systems.

■ How can it make you ill? Where can you get it from?

The most common way to contract the respiratory infection is by the inhalation of small water droplets (aerosols) which are sprayed from contaminated sources.

Examples

- Wet air conditioning systems
- Spa pools
- Water sprays
- Hot and cold water systems
- Hot tubs
- Fountains
- Water taps & hoses
- Water pumps
- Humidifiers
- Expansion vessels

Symptoms

- High temperature, fever
- Loss of appetite
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Cough
- Pneumonia
- Diarrhoea
- Signs of mental confusion

■ How long does it take to become ill? (Incubation period)

From exposure to infection and first sign of illness can be 6 to 7 days although it can be any time from 2 to 19 days.

■ What to do if you have become ill?

Antibiotics are required to treat the disease - for more information and advice contact your G.P. Some people are at higher risk of developing Legionnaires' disease: those with weakened immune system, smokers, history of heavy drinking, and history of respiratory or renal illnesses.

■ Environmental sources of Legionella, ideal conditions for bacterial growth

- Warm water temperatures between 20°C and 45°C
- Deposits which support bacterial growth such as rust, organic matter and biofilms
- Scale and corrosion
- Low flow or stagnation in any dead legs/blind ends of distribution system pipework and in water storage tanks

■ How can you reduce the risk?

The best thing to do is eliminate bacterial growth through good design and regular maintenance of your water systems.

- Clean and regularly maintain your artificial water systems, including ornamental fountains and ponds
- Clean and disinfect showerheads every 3 months
- Keep cold water below 20°C and hot water above 50°C
- Ensure water storage tanks are lidded and well insulated.
- Maintain recommended level of chemicals, such as chlorine, in hot tubs in addition to regular draining down and cleaning
- Flush all unused taps once a week and particularly after holidays/periods away from your home
- Regularly clean your rainwater storage tanks and water butts.
- Drain water from hose pipes before storing them.