
Legionella bacteria – fact sheet for occupants

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What is Legionella?

Legionnaires' disease is a potentially fatal form of pneumonia caused by the inhalation of small droplets of contaminated water suspended in the air containing the Legionella bacteria and cannot be acquired from drinking contaminated water or be transferred from person-to-person.

People most at risk from this are over 45 years old, smokers and heavy drinkers, people suffering from chronic respiratory or kidney disease, diabetes, lung and heart disease and anyone with an impaired immune system.

Legionella can grow when certain conditions allow, and in homes this relates to the hot and cold-water systems in particular. These conditions required are:

- a) Water temperature of 20 – 45°C (the bacteria is dormant below 20°C and will not survive above 60°C).
- b) A supply of nutrients such as other bacteria, algae, sediment and/or sludge within the system.

What occupants can do to reduce the risk

The risk of Legionnaires' disease occurring in an occupied residential dwelling is extremely low owing to daily water usage which is sufficient to turn over the entire system. That said, regular monitoring and cleaning by occupants can significantly reduce the risk. The subsequent advice should be followed by all occupants in order to reduce the risk of Legionella bacteria growth:

- a) Do not adjust the temperature setting on the hot water cylinder or boiler. The temperature should be set at 60°C and should not be altered.
- b) Showerheads must be cleaned regularly, a minimum of every three months using a proprietary shower head cleaner to disinfectant the head properly. Occupants should follow the cleaning products instructions to ensure the shower head is being properly cleaned and undertaken in a safe manner. It is important that the shower head is disconnected when cleaning and the hose left to run into a drain (plug hole) to release all the water in the hose.

- c) Inform the PDD team if the hot water is not heating properly. Hot water should run at a temperature of 50°C after it has run for a minute.
- d) Inform the PDD if the cold water is running warm (above 20°C) after you have initially run off any water which may have accumulated in the pipes.
- e) If a bathroom, cloakroom, outside wc etc. are not being used regularly (on a weekly basis), ensure you run the taps and showers once a week for a minimum of two minutes and flush toilets (with the lids down) once a week. This applies if you go on holiday for over seven days.
- f) Water tanks in roof voids should have a tight-fitting lid. If you access the attic to store items, please ensure the lid is not disturbed and fits the tank correctly.

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