



Legionella

Bacteria in water systems



What is legionnaires' disease?



Legionellosis is the collective name given to the pneumonia-like illness caused by legionella bacteria. This includes the most serious legionnaires' disease, as well as the similar but less serious conditions of Pontiac fever and Lochgoilhead fever.

Legionnaires' disease is a potentially fatal form of pneumonia and everyone is susceptible to infection. However, some people are at higher risk, including:

- people over 45 years of age and young children;
- smokers and heavy drinkers;
- people suffering from chronic respiratory or kidney disease; and anyone with an impaired immune system.

How is it caused?

The bacterium that causes the disease thrives when cold water is above 20°C and hot water is below 60°C. The following things can increase the chances of it being present in the home:

- Not keeping water tanks clean.
- Not maintaining the flow of water through all outlets (e.g. a rarely used shower).



Things to remember

Legionella are bacteria that are common in natural (rivers and lakes etc) and artificial water systems e.g. hot and cold water systems (storage tanks, pipework taps and showers).

Legionella is usually associated with larger water systems such as in hotels and hospitals however; it can also live in smaller water supplies used in residential accommodation i.e. your home. Not everyone who comes into contact with the bacteria gets the disease.



Symptoms to look out for:

The symptoms are similar to flu and include: high temperature, fever and chills; a cough; muscle pains and headaches. Contact your GP immediately if you suspect you may have legionnaires' disease. If your GP diagnoses legionnaires', contact us immediately so that water analysis and any necessary treatment can take place.

Handy hints and tips

If you have been on holiday or away from your property for longer than a week:

- Run all your taps to flush water through your system.
- Remove the shower head and clean before use.
- If the shower has a flexible hose, remove the shower head from the holder, wrap a towel round the head, lower into the bath or shower basin and run the shower for 10 minutes.
- Before washing your laundry, set the washing machine on a quick rinse. This will flush water through all the hoses and clean the washing machine.
- Flush all toilets with the seat down before use.

In addition to the above, it is advisable that you carry out the following checks or activities to minimise the risk of Legionella:

- If you have a shower:
 - a) Make sure it is used at least once a week.
 - b) clean the head of the shower at least once a month.
- Ensure all taps in your home (including any outside taps) are run once a week.
- If you have garden hoses and sprinklers, wrap a towel over the outlet and run for a couple of minutes before using to flush the water through the equipment.
- Make sure you empty watering cans after use.
- If you notice anything peculiar with your water supply e.g. discolouration, sludge or odour, contact us immediately.



Contact us

Contact us for further information about legionella

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