

Legionella Factsheet

What is Legionella?

Legionellosis is a collective term for diseases caused by **legionella** bacteria which can cause a pneumonia-like illness called Legionnaires' disease as well as similar but less serious conditions.

Where Does it Come From?

Legionellosis is the name given to a number of diseases caused by the Legionella bacterium. These diseases include Pontiac Fever, Lochgoilhead Fever and, perhaps the best known, Legionnaires' Disease. All these diseases cause a 'flu-like' illness but Legionnaires' disease can progress to pneumonia and can be fatal in 40% - 80% of cases dependent on for example, initial early diagnosis, the treatment available and the infected person's initial health.

The Legionella family of bacteria cause disease by the inhalation, not ingestion, of water vapour containing the bacteria. Any equipment that causes water to form an aerosol, including showers, ornamental fountains, can all cause illness in susceptible people.

The risks from hot and cold-water systems in residential settings are generally considered to be low owing to regular water usage and turnover.

A typical 'low risk' example may be found in a small building (eg housing unit) with small domestic-type water systems, where daily water usage is inevitable and sufficient to turn over the entire system; where cold water is directly from a mains supply (no stored water tanks); where hot water is fed from instantaneous heaters or low volume water heaters (supplying outlets at 50 °C); and where the only outlets are toilets and wash hand basins.

Who's at risk?

Everyone's susceptible to infection however some people are at higher risk including:

- **People over 45 years of age**
- **Smokers and heavy drinkers**
- **People suffering from chronic respiratory or kidney disease**
- **Anyone with an impaired immune system.**

How You Get Legionnaires' Disease

You can get Legionnaires' disease if you breathe in tiny droplets of water containing bacteria that cause the infection.

It's usually caught in places like hotels, hospitals or offices where the bacteria have got into the water supply. It's less common to catch it at home.

You can get Legionnaires' disease from things like:

- air conditioning systems
- humidifiers
- spa pools and hot tubs
- taps and showers that are not used often

You cannot usually get it from:

- drinking water that contains the bacteria
- other people with the infection
- places like ponds, lakes and rivers

Symptoms of Legionnaires' Disease

Symptoms of Legionnaires' disease include:

- A cough
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain or discomfort, particularly when breathing or coughing
- A high temperature
- Flu-like symptoms



People contract Legionnaires' disease by inhaling small droplets of water (aerosols), suspended in the air, containing the bacteria.

If you think you have symptoms of Legionnaires' disease, it's important to act quickly because it can be a serious form of pneumonia.

What to do right away

- **Seek medical attention immediately** — contact your GP, NHS 111, or go to urgent care/A&E if symptoms are severe.
- Tell the healthcare provider that you may have been exposed to contaminated water aerosols (e.g., hot tubs, hotels, air conditioning systems), as this helps with diagnosis.

Symptoms to watch for

Common symptoms include:

- High fever and chills
- Cough (often dry at first, then possibly with mucus)
- Shortness of breath
- Muscle aches
- Headache
- Confusion or difficulty thinking clearly
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhoea

Medical treatment

- Legionnaires' disease requires antibiotics (usually prescribed quickly once suspected).
- You may need hospital care, especially if symptoms are severe or worsen.
- Early treatment greatly improves recovery.

When it's an emergency

Call 999 or go to A&E immediately if there is:

- Difficulty breathing
- Chest pain
- Confusion or disorientation
- Symptoms rapidly getting worse

Important points

- It does not spread person-to-person — it comes from inhaling contaminated water droplets.
- Early recognition and treatment are crucial to avoid complications.

What Hjaltland Housing Association are doing to Keep You Safe:

For our properties they have either sealed systems or direct fed systems. Our simple control measures to help control the risk of exposure to Legionella, we will:

- Carry out and record the assessment of risk from exposure to Legionella to ensure the safety of our tenants

To manage the risks between different tenants, consideration will be given to implementing a suitable temperature checking regime. We will carry out the following on properties between tenants:

- Hot Water Cylinder - Minimum Temperature set at 60°C
- Hot Water - Minimum Temperature at Taps 50°C after 1 minute
- Cold Water - Maximum Temperature at Taps 20°C after 2 minutes
- Record information and maintain records

We will carry out the following on void properties where they have been vacant for 2 weeks, or between tenants at sheltered housing and independent living properties:

- Flushing out the system prior to letting the property
- Setting control parameters
 - Hot Water Cylinder - Minimum Temperature set at 60°C
 - Hot Water - Minimum Temperature at Taps 50°C after 1 minute
 - Cold Water - Maximum Temperature at Taps 20°C after 2 minutes
- Make sure any redundant pipework identified is removed.
- Record information and maintain records.



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What YOU can do to Keep Yourself Safe:

Although the Association takes precautions on legionella being present in hot or cold water systems within its properties, tenants should follow these guidelines to minimise the risk of Legionnaires' disease in their home:

Most importantly, make sure that:

- Ensure hot water is kept hot – contact the Association if your hot water system is not working
- Ensure cold water is kept cold – your home is connected to the mains water supply, with pipes and tanks insulated to ensure the temperature remains low
- The water you use is circulated – everyday use of your water systems will provide enough water movement to minimise stagnation
- Flush through showers and taps for 10 minutes following a period of non-use (i.e. after you have been on holiday or if a room is not in regular use)
- Keep all shower heads and taps clean and free from a build-up of lime scale, mould or algae growth, using disinfectants
- Report any deposits such as rust or any unusual matter flowing from your water outlets

Carrying out these simple precautions will help reduce the risk of bacterial build up in your hot and cold water systems.

1  **Flush through showers and taps for 10 minutes** following a period of non-use (i.e. after you have been on holiday or if a room is not in regular use)



2  **Keep all shower heads and taps clean** and free from a build-up of lime scale, mould or algae growth



3  **Report any deposits such as rust** or any unusual matter flowing from your water outlets



 Report to
Hjaltland Housing
Association
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