

Hot and cold water supply / Legionnaires' Disease Information for Practice Managers



**By Roving Practice
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- Water systems can harbour legionella bacteria which is the cause of Legionnaires' disease (which is a potentially fatal pneumonia) and other related diseases. Infection is caused by breathing in small droplets of water contaminated by the bacteria. Everyone is potentially susceptible to infection but some people are at higher risk, e.g. those over 45 years of age, smokers and heavy drinkers, those suffering from chronic respiratory or kidney disease, and people whose immune system is impaired.
- Legionella bacteria can contaminate and grow in hot and cold water systems. They survive low temperatures and thrive at temperatures between 20°C-45°C if the conditions are right, e.g. if a supply of nutrients is present such as rust, sludge, scale, algae and other bacteria. They are killed by high temperatures.
- Risks exist in cases where water droplets could be inhaled, e.g. in a shower or air conditioning.

Practice action

- Practices should carry out a [risk assessment](#) and prepare a course of action for preventing or controlling any risks. Such action might include:
 - Maintaining the hot water system at or above 60°C (at which the bacteria cannot survive) but beware of the risk of scalding
 - Flush infrequently used pipes through regularly (e.g. turn showers on weekly) and pay particular attention to little or unused clinical rooms, toilets and other water sources.
 - Ensure water storage tanks are covered and are inspected / flushed / descaled / disinfected periodically.
 - Testing should become part of your schedule – put it in your calendar. Establish how and who does it. **And monitor.**
 - Not doing it can be very disruptive and expensive.



Further information

[HSE guidance - 'Legionella and Legionnaires' disease'](#)

[HSE guidance - 'Health and social care services: Managing legionella in hot and cold water systems'](#)

[HSE guidance leaflet - 'Legionnaires' disease: A guide for employers'](#)

[HSE guidance booklet - 'Legionnaires' disease: The control of legionella bacteria in water systems: Approved Code of Practice and guidance on regulations'](#)

[GOV.UK guidance - 'Legionnaires' disease: guidance, data and analysis'](#)

HPA Website – Legionnaires' disease - [Legionnaires' disease: guidance, data and analysis - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) provides information on Legionnaires' disease and the requirement to report cases in England and Wales to the HPA

[Managing legionella in hot and cold water systems \(hse.gov.uk\)](#)

Some of the above information is freely available on the First Practice Management website which has other useful resources also:

[www.firstpracticemanagement.co.uk/health-and-safety-guidance/hot-and-cold-water-supply-legionnaires-disease/](#)

A useful place for online staff training is **Blue Stream**