

Legionella

Legionella bacteria is commonly found in water. The bacteria multiply where temperatures are between 20-45°C and nutrients are available. The bacteria are dormant below 20°C and do not survive above 60°C.

Legionnaires' disease is a potentially fatal type of pneumonia, contracted by inhaling airborne water droplets containing viable Legionella bacteria. Such droplets can be created, for example, by: hot and cold water outlets; atomisers; wet air conditioning plant; and whirlpool or hydrotherapy baths.

Anyone can develop Legionnaires' disease, but the elderly, smokers, alcoholics and those with cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory or kidney disease are at more risk.

The primary method used to control the risk from Legionella is water temperature control. Water services should be operated at temperatures that prevent Legionella growth:

- Hot water storage cylinders (called calorifiers, eg hot water tank) should store water at 60°C or higher
- Cold water should be stored and distributed below 20°C.

For most residential properties, the risk may be low.

Your landlord should have taken the following control measures to reduce the risk of Legionella:

- “Flush out” the water system before letting the property (for new tenants).
- Make sure cold water tanks are covered to stop debris getting into the system.
- Set ‘control parameters’ (hot water temperature settings) to make sure hot water is stored at the correct temperature (if the property has stored hot water, eg water in a hot water tank).
- Remove unused pipework (if necessary).

Tenants are responsible for taking the following control measures to reduce the risk of Legionella:

- As a general principle, outlets on hot and cold water systems (including showers) should be used at least once a week to maintain a degree of water flow and minimise the chances of stagnation. Stagnant water favours Legionella growth.
- After a period of absence of 1 week or longer (such as a holiday), each tap and water outlet (including showers) should be opened and left to run through for at least five minutes. The shower should be turned up so it's as hot as possible. This is to “flush out” the water system.
- “Flush out” infrequently used outlets (including showerheads and taps) at least weekly
- Clean, disinfect and de-scale shower heads and hoses at least quarterly
- Do not interfere with hot water temperature settings (eg on hot water tank or boiler)
- Tell the landlord if problems occur with the water system or if the water is not heating properly or if the cold water tank is not covered.

Notes:

1. Hot Water is normally heated by your boiler or by your hot water tank (if you don't have a boiler).
2. Hot Water should NOT be heated or stored above 65°C as this can cause scolding and can damage your system.
3. Boilers normally also heat the water in your Central Heating radiators. The above guidance is not about Central Heating, but your boiler may display/show the temperatures settings for Central heating. So, to help understand boiler temperature settings, as a rough general rule:
 - a. Older boilers are often set to approx. 75°C to 80°C for central heating.
 - b. Modern "Condensing" boilers (since approx. 2005) are normally set between 65°C and 75°C for central heating. If they are set to more than 75°C they do not recycle / recover heat and are more expensive to run. When they are set at approx. 65°C they work at the maximum heat recovery (if they can heat your property sufficiently at this temperature setting).
4. The best temperature settings for your boiler will be in the Manuals and have been setup by the Installer and Plumber. If you need advice please read your boiler manuals and ask the plumber next time he visits.