

Managing Legionella in your workplace

A free guide from Marsh Commercial



COVID-19: Managing Legionella in your workplace

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many places of work such as hotels, leisure facilities, offices, dental clinics, and hairdressers have had to temporarily close with only essential businesses staying open. In many cases, the closures happened immediately following a government announcement, which didn't leave much time to carry out important checks.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has issued its concerns about employers neglecting their Legionella risk assessments during their businesses' closure and after reopening. If your building has been closed or had reduced occupancy during COVID-19, water system stagnation may have occurred due to lack of use, increasing the risks of illnesses to the people on your premises.



What are your responsibilities?

As an employer who is in control of the premises, you have a duty to protect your people by identifying and controlling risks associated with Legionella.

You should review your risk assessment and manage the Legionella risks when you:

- Reinstate a water system or start using it again
- Restart some types of air conditioning units

If the water system is still used regularly, maintain the appropriate measures to prevent Legionella growth.

What is Legionella and why is it harmful?

Legionella is a type of bacterium found naturally in freshwater environments, like lakes and streams for example. It can become a health concern when it grows and spreads in man-made building water systems like;

- Showerheads and sink faucets
- Cooling towers (structures that contain water and a fan as part of centralised air-cooling systems for building or industrial processes)
- Commercial spa pools and hot tubs (that aren't drained after each use)
- Saunas, steam rooms, and other humidifiers
- Air washers
- Fire/dust/odour suppression systems
- Decorative fountains, water features, and sprinklers
- Hot water tanks and heaters
- Large plumbing systems
- Dead legs i.e. water pipes where water does not circulate easily.

Home and car air-conditioning units do not use water to cool the air, so they are not a risk for Legionella growth.



What is Legionnaires' disease?

Legionnaires' disease is a potentially fatal type of pneumonia caused by certain water-borne Legionella bacteria (Legionella Pneumophila).

Anyone can be infected, but vulnerable groups of people are more susceptible and prone to catching it, which is why you need the correct procedures in place to prevent a Legionella outbreak.

What should you look out for?

The control of Legionella bacteria may not be deemed a priority and control measures may be neglected; however, it's vital that, so far as reasonably practicable, control measures are maintained.

As an employer, you hold a legal obligation to;

- Ensure that a suitable and sufficient risk assessment is carried out to identify and assess the risk of exposure to Legionella bacteria from work activities and water systems on the premises. This should include a site survey of all the water systems.
- Ensure that the responsible person(s) carrying out the risk assessment is competent to do so. This may need the support of a reputable Legionella specialist.
- Be aware of the duties of suppliers and manufacturers of equipment that stores or distributes water in the workplace.
- Consider those people at risk including vulnerable people – those over 50, those with respiratory diseases, cancer, diabetes, kidney disease, alcoholics, smokers, and those with impaired immune systems. Vulnerable people in healthcare, residential and nursing homes are at particular risk.
- Consult with employees or their representatives on the findings of the risk assessment.





Sources of infection

In the UK, the disease is mostly found in large buildings such as hotels, hospitals, and sports and leisure centres as the water supplied to these settings come from lakes, rivers, and streams.

The bacteria thrive under the following conditions: -

- Water temperature in the range of 20-45°C (proliferation of bacteria is not likely below 20°C and they will not survive above 60°C)
- Stagnant water
- Nutrients - sludge, scale, rust, algae, other bacteria, available to allow bacteria to multiply.

The bacteria may also be found in “dead legs”, e.g. water pipes where water does not circulate easily.



What you need to consider in your Legionella risk assessment

Checklist

- Allocated management duties. Roles, responsibilities, contact details of relevant employees, contractors, and consultants.
- Training and competence of those associated with the risk from Legionella.
- Description of the water system and associated plant, pumps, outlets etc. including a schematic plan.
- The scope of the assessment e.g. is a full or part assessment of the whole premises required.
- Removing the risk by elimination or substitution.
- The potential for the water systems to be contaminated with Legionella and other contaminants.
- Safe operating procedures.
- Water treatment procedures.
- Monitoring, inspection, maintenance procedures and results.
- Regular reviewing of your procedures.

For more information, or to discuss a bespoke package, please contact:

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