

## **Legionella controls during Covid-19**

### **General advice**

The lockdown controls imposed to control the spread of Covid-19 have resulted in a number of premises being either closed or partly closed. This means that water systems, which are normally in regular use, may be left unused for a prolonged period.

Legionella bacteria is commonly found in water and will multiply when the water temperature is between 20–45°C. If heating systems are operational within buildings or ambient temperatures rise above 20°C, due to solar radiation then Legionella bacteria may start to multiply in water systems.

Legionella bacteria can cause Legionnaires' disease, which is a potentially fatal type of pneumonia. Infection is caused by breathing in water droplets that contain Legionella bacteria. Droplets can be released into the environment when water systems are used, which create sprays or mists. Examples of situations where may occur are in air-conditioning plants, showers, water sprays, whirlpool or hydrotherapy baths.

The risk of infected water being released is greater after a period of closure as the bacteria will have had time to multiply within the unused water system; therefore, it is essential that additional controls are put into place before the system is first used. Existing Legionella risk assessments should be reviewed to ensure that they address the risks associated with the closure period.

### **Preventative action**

Where possible, preventative action should be taken during the period of closure.

If evaporative cooling systems are in use, these must be maintained as usual or switched off safely (technical advice is likely to be needed to ensure that switching off a system is completed safely).

Where water systems have control measures built into the system, these should be maintained and kept working (if feasible) during the closure period. Simple preventative steps should be implemented during closure, such as ensuring that water systems are flushed through on at least a weekly basis (although more frequent flushing may be needed for some systems). Where this is feasible, a plan for flushing systems should be produced that addresses all of the system outlets (it is not good enough to just flush one or two outlets on a large system). It is recommended that records are kept of the preventative regime in place during the closure period.

Where feasible, the water levels in bulk tanks should be reduced, so that there is less water standing in the tank(s).

### **Before returning to normal operation**

At some point, the lockdown controls will be lifted and there will be pressure to quickly return to normal operations. A plan should be put into place to address the risks relating to a return to normal operations. Where water systems have been offline for a prolonged period, advice should be taken from a competent heating/ventilation engineer about pre-start checks and maintenance which should be undertaken. A system service, including a cleaning and disinfection process, may be appropriate before complex systems are brought back into use.

Even simple systems, such as spray taps and showers, may require cleaning and disinfection before being re-introduced.

It should be ensured that hot water systems are working correctly and are maintaining water temperatures of at least 60°C in storage cylinders (calorifiers) and above 50°C through the distribution system. Cold water should be distributed below 20°C.

### **Seek competent advice**

If you are not sure about the steps that need to be taken in relation to your building/water services then seek competent advice.

The Health and Safety Executive have produced a number of useful reference documents which provide useful advice, such as:

<https://www.legionellacontrol.org.uk/news/90/>

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/legionella-risks-during-coronavirus-outbreak.htm>

[Legionnaires' disease. The control of legionella bacteria in water systems – Approved Code of Practice and Guidance – L8](#)

[Control of legionella bacteria in water systems – Audit checklists](#)

Further guidance is also available at:

[Legionella Control Association – Safe Management of Water Systems in Buildings During the Covid-19 Outbreak](#)

[European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases \(ESCMID\) – Guidance on maintaining safe water systems](#)