

Legionella and Legionnaires' Disease- Advice for Tenants

Legionella is naturally occurring bacteria that can be found in water and water systems. It can result in a range of diseases including Pontiac Fever, Lochgoilhead Fever and Legionnaires' disease. It is rare, though not impossible, to contract these through a domestic water system but there are some simple precautions that can be taken to reduce the risk even further.

Those most at risk are: Elderly people, heavy smokers or drinkers, people with chronic respiratory or kidney disease, and those with diabetes, lung disease, heart disease or impaired immune systems.

Although common and naturally occurring, the bacteria is comparatively harmless where it exists in low concentrations. The risks increase where water is left stagnant and at a temperature warm enough for the bacteria to breed. Breeding occurs roughly between 20 and 45 °c. The biggest risk comes from breathing in contaminated water droplets making a shower probably the riskiest water source in a residential property.

The more still water stored in a property, the greater the risk and the risk increases the longer it takes for this water to be used. Therefore, under average conditions, a family of four children and their parents living in a 4-bed house will have less risk of build-up than a single resident who uses less water.

There are steps the Landlord takes to ensure the risk is reduced, however there are also things that the tenant, as the resident in the property, can do to help manage the risk too.

- If you have been away for 1 week or more, run the water through each outlet to clear any water that has been sitting in the system. Turning on taps in basins and baths and flushing the toilets is the most effective. To wash through the shower head, put the shower head down in the bath or shower tray to avoid too many water droplets in the air.
- If you have been away in the summer and have a cold-water storage tank, it could have sat for the whole time at over 20 °C, encouraging breeding. This is less likely to be a problem in the winter when the cold water will be stored at a cooler temperature. Ensure all cold-water outlets are flushed through for at least 2 minutes, with you keeping out of the way while this is being done to prevent breathing in droplets.
- The hot water temperature on the boiler should be set above 45°C to prevent bacteria breeding.

If you have outlets that aren't used often such as an en-suite in a spare bedroom, run water through the bath, basin, shower etc regularly and especially prior to anyone using it.

Carrying out these simple precautions will dramatically reduce the risk of contracting any of the diseases associated with these bacteria.

