

Looking after your home

Your Fact Sheet

Water Hygiene

The facts and what you need to know

This factsheet gives you information about water hygiene, the risks of contacting Legionnaires' disease through poor water hygiene and ways you can prevent it. As a landlord, we have a legal responsibility to ensure you are aware of the possible causes and symptoms so that you can identify any potential problems or areas of concern.

What is Legionella?

Legionella is a bacteria that can be found in some water systems. If people come in contact with this bacteria, it can cause Legionnaires' disease - an illness similar to pneumonia. It's extremely rare but is potentially fatal. People can catch Legionnaires' disease from hot and cold water heating systems which aren't functioning properly or have not been in use for some time. This could result in bacteria developing which could lead to you inhaling infected small droplets of water contained in the air.

Where can I find it?

All hot and cold water systems are likely to provide an environment where Legionella can grow. The main areas of risk are where the bacteria can increase to dangerous levels and spread. Showerheads and taps are the main areas of risk in someone's home.

Who is at risk?

Everyone is at risk of infection but it most commonly affects the elderly, or people with chest or lung problems. Not everyone exposed to Legionella bacteria becomes ill. Legionnaire's disease is not contagious and you cannot get it from drinking water.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of Legionnaires' disease are similar to the symptoms of the flu:

- high temperature
- fever or chills
- cough
- muscle pain
- headache
- tiredness
- changes to your mental state, such as confusion

On average, there are approximately 500 reported cases of Legionnaire's disease in the UK each year so it is very rare.

What precautions can I take?

Taking the following simple precautions will help keep you safe in your home:

- Do not interfere with the settings on your boiler or hot water system. The hot water should be set so that the water is heated up to 60°C.
- Keep all shower heads, hoses and taps clean and free from a build-up of lime scale, mould or algae growth. Take a look at our website which gives you advice about how to clean your shower head.
- Flush through showers and taps for 10 minutes following a period of non-use, for example after you have been on holiday or if a room is not regularly used.
- If showers are used only occasionally then flush them through by running them for at least two minutes every week. Don't stand near the shower whilst this is being done.
- If you think your shower, taps, boiler or hot water tank aren't working properly, please let us know. You can do this by reporting a repair on our website www.southliverpoolhomes.co.uk/repairs or by logging into your customer login area on the website. Alternatively give us a call on 0330 303 3000.

What is SLH doing about Legionella

As Legionella can develop in water systems, SLH has carried out a risk assessment to a selection of homes to identify and assess any risks to your wellbeing. We have taken appropriate measures to rectify any risks and will install low risk water systems where required.

Any risk to your wellbeing will remain low as long as simple control measures are followed. This is covered under 'What precautions can I take?'

Where can I find out more information?

The Health & Safety Executive is the government body responsible for water hygiene and Legionnaires' disease. For further information and advice visit

www.hse.gov.uk/legionnaires. Alternatively visit our website www.southliverpoolhomes.co.uk/waterhygiene