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Guidance on Legionnaires' Disease

What is legionnaires' disease

Legionnaires' Disease is a pneumonia-like illness caused by legionella bacteria and is potentially fatal. Everyone is susceptible to infection, however, some people are at higher risk, including:

- People over 45 years of age;
- Smokers and heavy drinkers;
- People suffering from chronic respiratory or kidney disease; and,
- Anyone with an impaired immune system.

Legionella bacteria are found in the natural environment and may contaminate and grow in water systems, including domestic hot and cold water systems. They survive low temperatures and thrive at temperatures between 20 – 45 °C if the conditions are right. They are killed by high temperatures at 60°C or above.

Breeding grounds within the home

Domestic hot and cold water systems can provide an environment where Legionella bacteria can grow.

Legionnaires' Disease can be caused by the inhalation of small droplets of contaminated water containing Legionella bacteria. Residents of rented domestic accommodation should follow the below guidelines to minimise the risk of Legionnaires' Disease within their home.

Most importantly, make sure that:

- Hot water in the system is kept hot;
- Cold water is kept cold;
- The water is kept circulated.

In particular, it is important that you:

- Tell us if the boiler or hot water tank are not working properly, particularly if the water is not coming out of the taps at a sufficiently high temperature. It should come out at a temperature of 50°C after it has run for a minute at the latest.
- 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.
- Tell us if the cold water is still running warm after you have initially run off any water, which may have accumulated in the pipes. It should not be above 20°C.
- Tell us if there are problems, debris or discolouration in the water.

Where showers are fitted:

- If they are used only occasionally then flush them through by running them for at least 2 minutes once a week. Keep out of the way whilst this is being done as far as possible.
- Clean the shower head periodically, descale and disinfect it. This should be done at least every six months.

Holiday + Vacant Periods

Where a property is left vacant for any time, please make sure that when it is occupied again at the outset both hot and cold water systems are flushed through by running all outlets for at least 2 minutes.

Although legally, it is your landlord's responsibility to take precautions to prevent Legionella being present in the hot or cold water system, residents also have an important part to play in taking these simple and practical precautions.