

# Water Hygiene Information for Tenants and Residents



We know that a clean water supply is vital to your health and wellbeing. This fact sheet is to help you prevent problems arising and to stay safe and well.

Most water systems contain bacteria and other organisms. If these are allowed to multiply they can cause people to become ill. The most common and high risk bacteria is legionella.

## What is legionella

- Legionella bacteria are common and can be found naturally in water sources such as rivers, lakes and reservoirs. They can survive under many environmental conditions and temperatures between 20°C and 45°C encourage their growth.
- Legionella transmission is via aerosols – the inhalation of mist droplets containing bacteria.
- However the disease is generally not a threat to most healthy individuals and tends to lead to harmful symptoms only in those with a compromised immune system, or the elderly. Person to person transmission of legionella has not been proved.

## Where do you find legionella bacteria?

- Legionella bacteria can breed in other places where water is stored, such as water systems and water cooling towers.
- The bacteria are more likely to grow where there is sediment.

## Is my home at risk from the legionella bacteria?

The risk in your home is low because your water is usually stored in small quantities at temperatures above 45°C and is used daily. This means the bacteria do not usually have time to grow to significant levels.

Risk can increase if a property has been empty for long periods of time, such as when tenants leave and the property is not immediately re-let.

Risk can also increase when you go on holiday for a week or more.

## What can I do to prevent legionella outbreaks?

Help keep yourself and your family safe. Use the following guidance:

- Store hot water at between 50°C and 60°C. The thermostat on your hot water cylinder (where applicable) will have been set to this temperature when you moved in. Combination boilers provide hot water directly to the taps without the need for a storage cylinder.
- If your property is empty for over a week, you should turn on your boiler/water heater and run the hot water for 10 minutes. This does not apply to homes with combination boilers.
- Clean showerheads and hoses every 3 months by removing the head of the shower and cleaning in hot water.
- Ensure that you turn on taps (including any in your garden) each week for at least 2 minutes.
- In periods of hot weather, typically during the summer months, stored cold water temperatures can rise. In these circumstances, extra attention should be given to more frequently turning on taps to increase the water flow through the system and lower temperatures.