

Control of Legionella Bacteria – Unoccupied Buildings

Legionnaires Disease

Legionnaires Disease is a potentially fatal disease caused by the bacteria legionella. It is a fatal form of pneumonia. Legionella is widespread in nature but is a major concern if it grows and spreads in man made water systems.

Legionella bacteria multiply at temperatures between 20°C – 45° with optimum growth between 35°- 40°. High temperatures above 60° will kill the bacteria.

Immunocompromised people, the elderly or those with respiratory problems may be particularly vulnerable. There are on average 10 cases of Legionnaires Disease reported each year in Ireland.

Outbreaks of Legionnaires' disease are linked to contaminated water. The bacteria will grow in biofilms (slime). Biofilms will form on surfaces where there is stagnant water or during times of low water flow.

Prevention of Legionnaires Disease

- In the event of closure, water systems should be safely shut down. Simple water systems should be left filled with cold water and not drained.
- Recommended to turn off the heating source to the water to ensure a cold-water system below 20°C. Flush to ensure cold water at each outlet. Every effort should be made to ensure cold water in storage.
- Recommended to check the temperature of the water when flushing.
- Recommend weekly flushing (minimum) of all outlets which have shut down. Run all sources of water including taps, showerheads etc.
- Keep taps, showerheads, hoses etc. free from biofilm and scaling.
- Ensure spas/pools are continuously treated.
- Implement a legionnaires control plan & the specific individuals responsible (at least two in the event one person requires sick leave). Ensure the control plans details the check points & how often they will be carried out.

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- Ensure a risk assessment is implemented and additional controls such as flushing of water is carried out.
- Provide training on legionnaires disease & control to staff members, those who are flushing units at a minimum.
- Water systems which have been shut down & maintained low water usage will require additional control measures.

Additional advice required for more complex systems.

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