

Legionnaires' Disease Guide

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What is Legionnaires' disease?

Legionnaires' disease is a potentially fatal form of pneumonia with symptoms similar to those of flu, i.e. high temperature, fever and chills, cough, muscle pains and headache.

In a severe case, there may also be pneumonia, and occasionally diarrhoea, as well as signs of mental confusion.

Who is most at risk?

There is no need for concern, Legionnaires' disease is rare, it is not contagious, however it is potentially fatal. People who are most at risk are the elderly or people with chest or lung problems and impaired immune system. Not everyone exposed to Legionella becomes ill and you cannot get it from drinking water.

Where can it be found?

The bacteria is common in natural water sources such as rivers, lakes and reservoirs, but usually in low numbers and may also be found in purpose built water systems such as cooling towers, evaporative condensers, whirlpool spas and hot water systems.

Where can it be caught from?

You could potentially be at risk of catching Legionnaires' disease through the water system in a property. Legionella bacteria can multiply in hot or cold water systems and storage tanks, and be spread when you run the water, but it is relatively easy for you to minimise the risk of the bacteria spreading.

How to minimise the risk

- Running taps and showers on full for a few minutes any time the property has been left empty for a couple of days, or when you first move in.
- Make sure that all the taps, showers and bathrooms are regularly cleaned and free from mould and limescale.
- If your property has a whirlpool bath, make sure that you follow the manufacturer's instructions on the type and frequency of cleaning it.

If you are experiencing any problems with the water not heating properly or you have any other problems with the system, you should let your landlord or letting agent know as soon as possible.

Further information can be obtained from:
www.hse.gov.uk/legionnaires