

Additional information for the 2009 Tenant Handbook

(To be included in Book

24th November 2009

Important information about Legionnaires' disease

Legionnaires' disease is a potentially fatal form of pneumonia, which can affect anybody. It is caused by certain types of Legionella bacteria. Infection with Legionella bacteria can be fatal in approx. 10 to 15% of reported cases; however this rate can be higher in a more susceptible population such as immuno-suppressed patients or those with other underlying disease. Certain groups of people are known to be at a higher risk of contracting Legionnaires' disease; men appear more susceptible than women, as do those over 45 years of age, smokers, alcoholics, diabetics and those with cancer or chronic respiratory or kidney disease.

On average there are approximately 200-250 reported cases of Legionnaires' disease per year in the UK, however it is generally thought that this may be an underestimate. Legionella bacteria can also cause less serious illnesses, which are not fatal or permanently debilitating.

Legionnaires' disease is contracted by inhaling the Legionella bacterium in tiny droplets of contaminated water (aerosols), therefore any water spray or splashing is a potential source of infection such as showers, hoses, or taps.

Legionella bacteria are common in nature and can be found in water sources such as rivers and lakes, usually in low numbers. Legionella bacteria will multiply more readily in slow moving or stationary water, and require a source of nutrients such as algae, scale, corrosion or sediment. Water temperatures in the range 20C to 45C seem to favour growth. The bacteria do not appear to multiply below 20C and will not survive above 60C.

At this time, there is no evidence of Legionnaires' disease being caught through person-to-person contact. The incubation period is between 2-10 days and not everyone exposed will develop the full-blown disease but may suffer mild flu like symptoms. Initial symptoms of the disease include high fever, chills, headaches and muscle pain. About one third of patients infected also develop diarrhoea or vomiting. Legionnaires' disease can be treated effectively with appropriate antibiotics.

You should be aware that the risk of contracting Legionnaire's disease from a domestic property where the water services are regularly used is very low however the risk increases if the water services have not been used for an extended period.

We recommend that you:

- Ensure the thermostat on your hot water system is set to a minimum of 65C, but be aware that the risk of scalding from outlets that are not fitted with a Thermostatic Mixer Valve is greatly increased.
- Any hot or cold tap that is not used within a seven day period should be flushed through for at least two minutes on a weekly basis or on your return to the property (avoid splashing to minimise the release of water droplets / aerosols)
- Any shower that is not used within a seven-day period should be flushed through for at least two minutes on a weekly basis or on your return to the property at both maximum and minimum temperatures. Avoid the release of water droplets / aerosols by either securing a plastic bag over the shower head with a corner cut off to allow water to escape or by removing the shower head and placing the shower hose directly over the drain outlet.
- Any toilet that is not used within a seven-day period should be flushed on a weekly basis or on your return to the property (the lid should be closed to avoid contact with any water droplets / aerosol).
- Shower heads should be regularly cleaned and disinfected to ensure there is no scale or algae build up.