



Legionella Management - Frequently Asked Questions

What is Legionella?

Legionella pneumophila is a bacterium commonly associated with Legionnaires' disease. Legionnaires' disease is a type of pneumonia. It was named after an outbreak of severe pneumonia that affected a meeting of the American Legion in 1976. It is an uncommon but serious disease.

Where does it come from?

Legionella are common in natural water systems such as rivers and lakes and artificial water systems, eg hot and cold water systems, storage tanks, showers, cooling towers and whirlpool spas.

How do people become ill?

People catch Legionnaires' disease by inhaling small droplets of water suspended in the air, which contain the bacteria. These are sometimes referred to as contaminated aerosol.

What is the risk?

The risk of somebody becoming ill depends on a number of factors including:

- A suitable temperature for growth, 20°C to 45 °C;
- A source of nutrients for the organism, eg sludge, scale, rust, algae, and other organic matter;
- A way of creating and spreading breathable droplets, eg the aerosol created by a cooling tower or spa pool; and
- Particularly susceptible persons such as those with existing illness and the elderly.

It must be noted that most people exposed to Legionella do not become ill, and Legionnaires' disease does not spread from person to person.

Are there laws and regulations with regards to Legionella?

Yes. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSWA) and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1999 (COSHH) place legal duties on employers and those responsible for the control of premises, to control the risk from exposure to the bacteria.

The Approved code of practice and guidance, known as L8, gives advice on these legal duties and sets out strategies for controlling the risk. If you follow the advice contained within L8, you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law.

What do I need to do next?

In accordance with L8 you should:

- Identify and assess sources of risk;
- Prepare a plan for preventing or controlling the risk;
- Implement and manage the plan - this will involve appointing a person to be managerially responsible, sometimes referred to as the 'responsible person';
- Provide training to relevant staff - Legionella awareness training is a good start;
- Keep records and check that what has been done is effective; and
- If applicable you may need to notify the local authority that you have a cooling tower(s) on site.

How does Core's Legionella risk assessment work?

Our standard Legionella risk assessment is tailored to the individual needs of the client, to ensure that the client is doing everything reasonably practicable to control the risk posed from Legionella. All risk assessments are carried out by our experienced team of fully-qualified consultants.

We will arrange an initial meeting or discussion regarding the level of risk and the type of systems, and agree on the content of the risk assessment and how it is to be presented, as well as a time frame for completion of work. The nature of the site and the complexity of the water system will impact on the level of assessment required.

What is the aim of a Legionella risk assessment?

The assessment aims to provide a foundation for controlling the risk, but it is by no means the end of the management process. If the risk assessment identifies a foreseeable risk of Legionella, a scheme for controlling these risks will be required.

What does the assessment include?

As a minimum, our Legionella risk assessment will include the following sections:

- An introduction to Legionella bacteria and the relevant legislation
- A basic description of all the water services and identification of particular risk systems
- Condition survey reports of all system components
- Appraisal of the current management procedures
- A risk evaluation summary
- Comprehensive recommendations for future control measures
- Photographic evidence of the condition of systems
- An asset register detailing all plant associated with the water system
- Basic schematic drawings of the water system
- A glossary of terms used within the risk and associated documents

What are the symptoms of Legionnaires' disease?

Symptoms are similar to those associated with the flu, and include:

- High temperature, feverishness and chills
- Cough
- Muscle pains
- Headache

These can lead to pneumonia, very occasionally with diarrhoea and signs of mental confusion.

How is it treated?

The illness is treated with antibiotics.

What should I do if I think I may have Legionnaires' disease?

If you develop the above symptoms and you are worried that it might be Legionnaires' disease, see your GP. Because it is so similar to the flu, it is not always easy to diagnose. When doctors are aware that the illness is present in the local community, they have a much better chance of diagnosing it earlier.

If you suspect that you may have contracted the illness as a consequence of your work then you are advised to report this to your manager, as well as your health and safety representative and occupational health department, if you have one. There is a legal requirement for employers to report cases of Legionnaires' disease that may be acquired at their premises to the Health and Safety Executive.