

# Regulatory Services

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## **Businesses and organisations urged to ensure processes are in place to prevent and control the spread of harmful germs in the workplace**

Regulatory Services are encouraging businesses and organisations to ensure they have the right processes in place to help prevent and control the spread of harmful bacteria in the workplace.

### **What is Legionella?**

*Legionella pneumophila* is an organism that is commonly found within water in the natural environment, such as warm ponds and lakes. The bacteria can cause Legionnaires disease and a mild form of illness called Pontiac Fever.

The creation of man-made water systems, such as spa pools, cooling towers and hot water systems can create conditions that are favourable for the bacteria to grow, which increases the risks of Legionnaires disease. It is therefore important to manage and control these risks.

**Harmful bacteria** such as Legionella can pose a real risk to organisations who have a duty to ensure the health and safety of their employees and customers.

Outbreaks of Legionnaires disease can occur in hospitals, garden centres, car washes, leisure facilities and factories with evaporative condenser type cooling systems and can also occur in restaurants, hotels and care homes.

### **What are my duties/ how can I control Legionella?**

“As highlighted in the HSE’s code of practice, employers and anyone in control of buildings are reminded of the duty to manage risks from Legionella bacteria in water systems. In particular:

- 1) Identify and assess sources of risk. This includes checking whether conditions will encourage bacteria to multiply. Water temperatures between 20–45 °C, a means of creating and disseminating breathable droplets, such as the aerosol created by cooling towers, showers and spa pools and ‘at risk’ i.e. susceptible people who could be exposed to contaminated aerosols.

Where there is a risk of exposure, you must:

- 2) Prepare a written scheme for preventing or controlling the risk.
- 3) Implement, manage and monitor precautions – if control measures are to remain effective, regular monitoring of the systems and control measures is essential. Monitoring general bacterial numbers can indicate whether you are achieving microbiological control and sampling for legionella is another means of checking that a system is under control
- 4) Keep records of the precautions
- 5) Appoint a competent person with sufficient authority and knowledge of the installation to help take the measures needed to comply with the law

“Further guidance is at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/legionnaires> and in the HSE Guidance document L8 “Legionnaires' disease: The control of legionella bacteria in water systems” and associated technical guidance, via free download at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l8.htm>”

Both Public Health England and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) websites offer extensive advice and information around disease control. The HSE's ‘Legionnaires’ disease A brief guide for duty holders’ leaflet is aimed at employers and people in control of premises, where man-made water systems are used that could be a potential source for legionella bacteria growth. The leaflet provides information to help employees understand the health risks associated with legionella.

More extensive HSE advice can be found at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/legionnaires/what-you-must-do.htm>

You can also find information about Legionella on Shropshire Councils website at <https://new.shropshire.gov.uk/environmental-health/health-and-safety/health-and-safety-for-business/guidance-notes/control-of-legionella-bacteria/>

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