



COVID-19 & Legionella Control

What You Need To Know



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Overview

At this difficult time the control of legionella is probably the last thing on our minds. However, any owner of any commercial premises still has responsibility under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 to maintain water systems in a safe manner.

This short guide will explore a few things that you need to consider throughout this period.

Essential Workers

Are commercial or healthcare premises being used by essential workers?

If buildings are still in use for essential workers such as in health care premises; hospitals and some commercial properties then the services must continue to be maintained in accordance with Health Technical Memorandum HTM 04-01: Safe water in healthcare; or for commercial premises Legionnaires' Disease – The control of legionella bacteria

in water systems Approved Code of Practice & Guidance L8 (Fourth Edition) & Technical Guidance HSG274.

Water systems in the building may have lower usage and the low use water systems and outlets will have to be flushed weekly or more frequent basis as determined by a risk assessment.

At Risk

Water Systems

- Domestic Water Systems in commercial premises
- Domestic Water Systems in residential accommodation
- Other At Risk Water Systems

Domestic Water Systems in commercial premises

In many buildings there will be no essential workers and the usage will be zero. Buildings provided with old fashioned urinals which flush regularly, will provide some water movement. However, most urinal systems are now fitted with some form of water saving device which means there will be negligible water flow in the system.

The entire water system in the premises will therefore be considered to be stagnating, increasing the risk of legionella growth. Under normal circumstances the cleaners; security or

maintenance department will be requested to undertake flushing on a weekly or more frequent basis.

However, under current circumstances, to undertake flushing on a weekly or more frequent basis may not be reasonably practicable or even possible.

The following pages suggest an approach which could be considered.

Suggested Approach: Domestic Water Systems in commercial premises

1.

Review the previous risk assessments and any sample results.

Does the premises have any high risk sources? If so, can the high risk source be isolated and drained.

2.

For all premises, if you are not allowed access, the water systems will stagnate over time and there will be an increased risk of legionella colonisation and increased risk of legionellosis when the building is reoccupied. Prior to reoccupation, the building must be disinfected in accordance with paragraphs 2.126 – 2.137 of HSG274 Part 2 The control of legionella bacteria in hot and cold water; and PD 855468:2015 Published Document Guide to the flushing and disinfection of services supplying water for domestic use within buildings and their curtilages.

Suggested Approach: Domestic Water Systems in commercial premises

3.

For all premises, if property security; cleaning or maintenance staff are allowed on site:

- a. can the cold water storage tank be bypassed and the tank drained down?
- b. if the tank cannot be isolated, can the tank be treated in any way, such as with sodium hypochlorite or other suitable biocide. Adding a biocide, on a regular basis (weekly) manually, to down cold water service tanks will help reduce bacteria and legionella growth.
- c. if cold water services are subject to heat gain from warm risers; or are close to LTHW or HWS systems, turn off the heating systems; open up the riser cupboard doors and leave them open, if safe to do so.
- d. turn off LTHW systems; all calorifiers and hot water cylinders in landlords and tenants areas. The HWS circulating pumps should be kept running.
- e. point of use heaters, in landlord and tenants areas, notably those beneath sinks should be switched off locally as they heat the cupboards they are stored in and the cold water pipework.
- f. drinking water coolers should be switched off.
- g. if allowed access to the premises flush sentinel points weekly for 5 minutes. Sentinel outlets for most premises are the top and bottom of each mains; hot water and down cold water service riser.

Suggested Approach: Domestic Water Systems in commercial premises

4.

Has legionella been detected in the premises in the last 2 years? If so, there is a higher risk of legionella returning.

In addition to paragraph 3, **all** outlets on the mains; hot water and down cold water service in the landlords and tenants areas should be flushed weekly. The level of flushing should be sufficient to turn over the entire water system. The level may be reduced if sodium hypochlorite is being added to the cold water tanks.

5.

If water systems have been flushed and maintained;

- a. prior to reoccupation, drain down all stored water services (tanks and calorifiers) and refill. Turn on all water heaters to 70°C and undertake thermal disinfection flushing all hot water outlets. Return all thermostats to 60°C Undertake extensive flushing of all cold water outlets, including all outlets in kitchens; and toilet areas. Flush all toilets several times. Ideally the building should be disinfected as detailed in paragraph 2. However, priority should be given to premises where there has been no flushing during the crisis.
- b. As soon as possible after reinstatement of water services sampling should be undertaken as soon as possible to ensure the water systems are safe.

Domestic Water Systems in residential accommodation provided by landlords

All water services must continue to be maintained in accordance with Approved Code of Practice & Guidance L8 (Fourth Edition) & Technical Guidance HSG274.

Other Water Systems

Other at risk water systems such as water features should be switched off and drained down, if possible.

Wet Cooling Towers

If a building is not being used; it is recommended that the air conditioning systems and the cooling tower systems should be shut down and drained in accordance with the scheme of control's shut down procedures.

If the building management still believes that the cooling towers are required to be operational, they must continue to be operated in a safe manner and be treated, maintained, tested checked and cleaned as normal following the scheme of control that is currently in place.

If the building cannot treat, maintain, test, check or clean the cooling tower in accordance with the scheme of control it must be shut down and drained in accordance with the schemes shut down procedures.

Prior to the premises reopening, disinfect and start the cooling towers in accordance with the scheme of control start up procedures. If unavailable, follow paragraphs 1.23-1.25; and 1.112 of HSG274 Part 1 The control of legionella bacteria in evaporative cooling systems.

You're in safe hands

Tetra Consulting provide independent safety risk consultancy and smart solutions to help you protect your most important assets: people, property and brand. Our mission is to support and educate you and your company in safety risk management and compliance by providing solutions informed by our knowledge and client insights.

If there are any other types of water source you need to consider or you have any questions please contact Barry Hilton, Head of Specialist Services at Tetra on +44 7793 874545 or email barry.hilton@tetraconsulting.co.uk





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