

A clean water supply is essential to ensure good health. It is normal for water systems to contain some bacteria and other organisms, but if conditions allow them to multiply, then they can occasionally pose a risk to your wellbeing. Legionella is a common bacteria that can cause illness – notably Legionnaires’ disease. The risk of Legionella posing a threat in your home is very low; water here is generally stored and used in such a way that bacteria does not thrive.

What is Legionnaires’ disease?

Legionellosis (or Legionnaires’ disease) is the name given to a pneumonia-like illness caused by breathing in legionella bacteria in airborne water droplets. Legionnaires’ disease can only be contracted by inhalation, NOT by drinking contaminated water or from person to person. It is not contagious. The elderly and those with an existing weak immune system are the most susceptible. If diagnosed it can be treated with anti-biotics.

How does legionella bacteria thrive?

Any water system that has the right conditions could potentially be a source for legionella bacteria to grow. Legionella bacteria are more likely to thrive in stagnant/slow moving water, and where there is sediment. It can survive in temperatures between 20°C and 45°C. The bacteria are naturally occurring and can be found in rivers, lakes, and reservoirs – but can also be found in other areas such as household water systems, garden hoses, water butts and compost heaps.

Guidance for preventing legionella

- Keep hot water stored at above 60°C. This is the temperature that the thermostat on your hot water cylinder (where applicable) will have been originally set to.
- If your property has been empty for a week or more, run taps and showers for 2 minutes.
- On return from a holiday the boiler/water heater should be switched on and water allowed to heat up (not applicable for combination boilers or instantaneous showers).
- Shower heads and hoses should be thoroughly cleaned and descaled with vinegar every three months.
- Make sure taps are turned on for at least two minutes each week. This includes external taps and hoses.
- Saffron inspects homes every six years and checks any potential hazards including debris in tanks, missing tank lids or insulation.

Contact us:

 01508 532000

 info@saffronhousing.co.uk

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