



# What is Legionella?

**Legionella** is the name given to a group of bacteria that's found in almost all water sources including streams, rivers and lakes. It can also be found in soil, compost and mains water, and can potentially enter and thrive in domestic water systems.

## **Is Legionella harmful?**

Legionella can be harmful if the conditions are right for the bacteria to multiply and if you inhale water droplets from a contaminated water system; showers typically can present a risk in a domestic house or flat but there are other water outlets that can cause a problem.

The legionella bacteria has many groups with different levels of severity - most of these aren't serious. However, the most harmful strain can be fatal in 10% to 12% of cases.

Everyone is potentially susceptible to infection but people at higher risk include those over 45 years, smokers, heavy drinkers, people with diabetes, cancer, chronic respiratory or kidney disease and people whose immune system is impaired.

## **What is Plymouth Community Homes doing about Legionella?**

We are carrying out water hygiene assessments as part of our legal obligations. We already regularly monitor and inspect some of our larger buildings to make sure water systems are clean and safe.

# What can I do to prevent it?

You can provide our assessor access to your home for them to test your water. This should take about 30 minutes to an hour, dependent on the type and size of your home. It's very unlikely you'll have Legionella as the main causes are storing large amounts or leaving it standing in pipes.

## **De-scale and clean taps and showers**

Legionella bacteria can multiply on scale, dirt or rust, so de-scale and clean taps and showers every three months or when there is an obvious build-up. Brush the scale off with a nylon brush and wipe with a diluted bleach solution. You can buy de-scaling solution from hardware shops. Take care not to splash any solution into your eyes and wash your hands after use.

## **Set the right temperature**

Legionella bacteria is more likely to grow between 20°C and 45°C, so where possible set hot water cylinders at 60°C. Using cold taps regularly can help temperatures stay below 20°C.

## **Use water taps once a week**

This helps to make sure you don't have water standing still in pipes. If you've been away for more than a week, run all your taps for a few minutes before using the water. You'll also need to run the water in your shower. Make sure the water doesn't spray or splash too much as this can create water droplets. If you can't remove the shower head, cover it with a towel or plastic while you run the water.