

# Legionnaires' Disease: A Guide for Childcare Providers.

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Since the outbreak of Covid 19 and the subsequent lockdown, many childcare providers have closed or operated a much reduced service. Many providers had to make decisions quickly and may not have had time to put in place procedures to ensure the safety of their water supply while they were closed. This guidance has been prepared by CWLWM to support childcare providers as they prepare to reopen and move out of lockdown.

## What is Legionnaires' disease?

Legionnaires' disease is a form of pneumonia which occurs when tiny droplets of water containing the legionella bacteria are inhaled into the lungs. This bacteria can be found in any purpose built water systems and builds up where a water supply has been shut down or had less use than normal.

## Why is there more risk after lockdown?

The risk of the bacteria entering the water supply is always present however the following circumstances increase the risk;

Where water is left in the system without movement for more than a week it will stagnate encouraging the build-up of the bacteria.

Recent warm weather may have caused the temperature of water in the system to rise above 20°C causing the bacteria to thrive. Hot water (above 50°C) which will destroy the bacteria will not have been run through the system.

As a result of COVID19 an increased number of people will have a compromised respiratory system making them more susceptible to Legionnaires' disease.

## What is the Legal Position?

There are a number of regulations that cover Childcare providers. Standard 24 of the National Minimum Standards covers general safety and requires a risk assessment to be carried out when there are changes to the premises or needs of the children. Health and Safety legislation requires business owners and

employers to manage the risks of water systems and to keep them safe for users.

## What Do You Need to Do Next?

It is important to carry out a full risk assessment ahead of reopening (as per the CIEH Guidance) including the nature of the water supply and the risk to any individuals who may be more susceptible to respiratory complaints.

If you rent your premises discuss the situation with your Landlord as they have a legal responsibility to ensure the water supply is safe. Decide what type of hot and cold water system you have, most households and settings will have a simple system that can be made safe by following a few procedures.

Firstly run water through the system for a period of time to flush out any stagnant water.

*Note – it is important to minimise the risk of inhaling water droplets during this process so flush all toilets with the seat down, wear an appropriate respiratory mask or run the water at a slow speed to minimise splashing.*

Increase the temperature of hot water systems to above 60°C if possible and draw it through to all hot water outlets. *Note- water at this temperature is a scalding risk, childcare premises should have a thermostatic mixing valve before the tap to reduce the temperature to around 43°C.*

Keep a record of the date, time and who carries out the procedure. If your system is more complicated or you have any additional concerns then further advice should be sought from the Environmental Health Department of the Local Authority or a specialist advisor.

**Further Information.** Further information can be found at

Chartered Institute of Environmental Health.  
<https://www.cieh.org/media/4208/legionella-guidance-covid-19.pdf>

Health & Safety Executive  
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/>