

# Prevent the growth and spread of *Legionella* in buildings

## FOR BUILDING OWNERS AND FACILITY MANAGERS

It is important that building owners and facility managers understand their plumbing system and follow all federal, state, and local codes and statutes applicable to their plumbing and type of facility.

Building owners may need to make changes to their plumbing systems or fixtures to fully implement the best practices for their building.

A key way to control *Legionella* is disinfection. Grand Rapids Public Utilities began disinfection in the community public water supply on June 24, 2024. Preventing the spread and growth of *Legionella* in a building depends on additional factors that work together. For the best public health outcomes, several controls may be needed to reduce risk. Building owners should:

- **Keep it clean.** Clean and maintain devices such as faucets, showerheads, and water heaters per the manufacturers' recommendation to limit sediment, scale, corrosion, and biofilm.
- **Keep it cold.** Cold water should be kept cold throughout a building's plumbing. Below 68 degrees Fahrenheit is best.
- **Keep it hot.** Hot water should be kept hot throughout a building's plumbing. Determining appropriate hot water temperatures will depend on your plumbing, your fixtures, and your facility type (such as a nursing home). The resources listed below can help you decide how best to maintain hot water in your system while also protecting water users from scalding. If your building does not currently have thermostatic mixing valves at showers and faucets, you may need to install them to store and circulate water at the recommended temperatures.
- **Keep it moving.** Moving water will help you maintain appropriate temperatures and avoid stagnation, which can allow *Legionella* to grow. Keeping water moving in your building will also help you pull disinfected water from the community water supply into your building.

*Legionella* grows best between 77 and 113 degrees Fahrenheit. Avoid these temperatures by keeping cold water cold, by storing hot water hot and managing water temperature at point-of-use, and by keeping water moving.

## Resources for building owners

### Water management programs might be right for some buildings

CDC offers a quick assessment worksheet, [Identify Buildings with Increased \*Legionella\* Risk](https://www.cdc.gov/control-legionella/php/toolkit/wmp-worksheet.html) ([www.cdc.gov/control-legionella/php/toolkit/wmp-worksheet.html](https://www.cdc.gov/control-legionella/php/toolkit/wmp-worksheet.html)), to help you determine if your building needs a water management program. If you determine a water management program is appropriate for your building, CDC offers a practical guide to implementing industry standards: [Toolkit: Developing a \*Legionella\* Water Management Program](https://www.cdc.gov/control-legionella/php/toolkit/wmp-toolkit.html) (<https://www.cdc.gov/control-legionella/php/toolkit/wmp-toolkit.html>).

## Other actions you can take in your building

### Monitoring your water

Building owners should monitor the water temperature, pH level, and disinfection residuals. They also should identify areas in their plumbing where water moves slowly. If monitoring identifies any issues, promptly addressing them can reduce the risk of *Legionella* growth and spread in a building's water system. Refer to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance for water monitoring for *Legionella* control at [Monitoring Building Water \(https://www.cdc.gov/control-legionella/php/guidance/monitor-water-guidance.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/control-legionella/php/guidance/monitor-water-guidance.html).

### Controlling *Legionella* in common sources of exposure

If you decide your building does not need a water management program at this time, but you would like to learn more about opportunities to control *Legionella*, CDC provides guidance for a variety of scenarios including potable water systems, cooling towers, hot tubs, and decorative fountains at [Toolkit: Controlling Legionella in Common Sources of Exposure \(https://www.cdc.gov/control-legionella/php/toolkit/control-toolkit.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/control-legionella/php/toolkit/control-toolkit.html).

### Working with a consultant

Some building owners may find it best to work with a *Legionella* consultant to help monitor their water and apply best practices to slow *Legionella* growth and spread. CDC provides guidance for determining if you need to work with a consultant and what to consider when choosing a consultant at [Working With Legionella Consultants \(https://www.cdc.gov/control-legionella/php/wmp/consultants-considerations.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/control-legionella/php/wmp/consultants-considerations.html).

## Information about Legionnaires' Disease

Legionnaires' disease is a serious type of pneumonia (lung infection) caused by *Legionella* bacteria in small water droplets in the air. People can get sick if they breathe in those droplets, which can be spread by devices that create water mist, such as showers, hot tubs, decorative fountains, and cooling towers. Legionnaires' disease is not spread person to person. People at increased risk for Legionnaires' disease include people over 50 years old, current or former smokers, and people with specific health issues or conditions such as cancer or chronic lung disease. More information is available on MDH's website: [About Legionnaires' Disease \(https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/legionellosis/basics.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/legionellosis/basics.html).

If someone who lives or works in your building develops symptoms of Legionnaires' disease — such as fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, headache, muscle aches, or fatigue — MDH recommends they seek medical attention.

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To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-5414.