



AMERICAN WATER

WE KEEP LIFE FLOWING®

Providing safe and reliable water is American Water's business. We are recognized as an industry leader and work cooperatively with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency so that implementation of existing drinking water standards and development of new regulations will produce benefits for our customers.



# LEGIONELLA

## WHAT IS LEGIONELLA?

Legionella are bacteria. There are over 60 species of Legionella that occur in many different environments, including rivers, lakes and soils. Legionella pneumophila is the most common cause of life threatening pneumonia in humans, and fatalities can range between 3-33%. Most susceptible include the elderly, smokers and immunocompromised individuals.

## HOW DO PEOPLE GET LEGIONELLA?

Legionella grows in conditions where water stagnates at warm temperatures with not enough disinfectants. People are infected through inhalation of Legionella contaminated water droplets from various sources, such as heating, ventilation, humidification and cooling systems, as well as water features (e.g., hot tubs, water fountains) or possibly even showerheads. Exposure occurs outside the water utility infrastructure, and is most likely in complex plumbing systems like multi-story hotels, hospitals, and high-density residential, industrial or institutional buildings.

## DOES THE EPA HAVE GUIDELINES FOR LEGIONELLA IN DRINKING WATER?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulates drinking water for specific contaminants under the Safe Drinking Water Act. Legionella is currently not on the list of contaminants that is specifically monitored under these regulations. However, the EPA requires treatment for other pathogens

**QUALITY. ONE MORE WAY WE KEEP LIFE FLOWING.**

We never forget that at the end of every water pipe there's a family depending on us to provide life's most critical need. That every treatment plant serves as a barrier against potential disease. And that every community should be stronger because we are there.

**Dr. Lauren Weinrich**, Director,  
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American Water

(i.e., Giardia and viruses) using disinfection. These disinfection processes have also been found to be effective for managing Legionella in drinking water systems.

## DOES AMERICAN WATER MONITOR ITS WATER SUPPLIES FOR LEGIONELLA?

No standardized methods currently exist to allow for routine monitoring and analyses of Legionella. However, American Water follows all guidelines for maintenance of disinfectant residual throughout the drinking water distribution systems and performs necessary sampling to understand overall water quality. In addition, American Water is leading several externally-funded research projects into the detection and management of Legionella and other opportunistic pathogens.



## MINIMIZE YOUR EXPOSURE TO LEGIONELLA

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information, customers can contact the US Environmental Protection Agency's Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791.

### WHAT CAN PEOPLE DO TO MINIMIZE EXPOSURE TO LEGIONELLA?

The bacteria Legionella, which causes Legionnaires' disease, poses a minor risk for most healthy individuals. Cases of illness are likelier found in people occupying more complex plumbing systems of larger buildings rather than a single-family home or townhome. However, if your home has people living in it who may be at risk (those over 50, smokers, those with weak immune systems), or if you just want to take additional precautions, here are some ways to reduce or minimize the growth of Legionella in the plumbing of your home.



#### Showerheads and Faucets

Regular maintenance is a simple task that, when done often, can minimize risk of Legionella. For example, cleaning showerheads and faucet aerators at least four times per year can minimize the growth of the Legionella bacteria. Clean them more often if your home has high risk patients or if there is build-up of minerals or slimy film.



#### Maintaining Your Hot Water Heater

Keeping your home's water heater at 140°F will reduce the growth of Legionella. However, to reduce the risk of scalding, the temperature of water leaving the shower head or faucet should be no higher than 122°F. A qualified or licensed plumber could be contacted to install mixing valves, if your home does not have them, to control the water temperature at the shower head or faucet.



#### Water Filters

Water filters that are installed at the kitchen faucet, also called point-of-use (POU) filters, can be useful when patients with weak immune systems need additional layers of protection. These filters can be installed at the point where water comes out of the tap. It is very important that these filters be changed according to the manufacturer's recommendations because if not, Legionella bacteria can grow on the filters and lower the water quality. Various filters are commercially available and can be found through search engines using the search terms "Legionella Water Filter."



#### Humidifiers

Humidifiers create fine mists of water that can host and transport Legionella bacteria straight into your lungs, if they are not cleaned properly. Humidifiers can be complex appliances, so it is best to follow the manufacturer instructions for cleaning and maintaining them.

### LEARN MORE

For additional information, visit [amwater.com/corp/legionella-homeowners](https://www.amwater.com/corp/legionella-homeowners).

