

Prevent Legionnaires' Disease at Home

If you are an older adult or have a chronic health condition, you may be at higher risk of Legionnaires' disease. Learn what you can do to reduce your risk at home.

About *Legionella* and Legionnaires' disease

Legionnaires' disease is caused by a type of bacteria called *Legionella*. *Legionella* grow in warm water, such as large plumbing systems, decorative fountains, hot water tanks, hot tubs, and cooling towers. *Legionella* grow best when water systems are not hot enough or well maintained.

People get Legionnaires' disease when they breathe in water or water vapor that contains *Legionella*. *Legionella* may not infect most people. However, older adults and people with health conditions are at higher risk of developing Legionnaires' disease, which causes symptoms like pneumonia.

Who is at risk?

People at higher risk of Legionnaires' disease:

- Are 50 years of age or older
- Smoke or used to smoke
- Have a chronic lung disease, such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder (COPD) or emphysema
- Have a weakened immune system from diseases like cancer, diabetes, or kidney failure
- Take medicines that weaken the immune system (such as prescriptions given after a transplant operation or chemotherapy).

Advice for people at risk

Prevent the growth of *Legionella* and other bacteria in household water systems.

Let your water run. Run your faucets on low to avoid splashing for 3 minutes if:

- They have not been used for three or more days
- Your home water system was turned off for plumbing work
- You received a boil water order notice.



Drain garden hoses. Avoid leaving water-filled hoses lying in the sun. Warm, stagnant water promotes the growth of *Legionella* and other bacteria.

Use the type of water recommended by your in-home medical equipment or health care provider. This includes humidifiers, CPAP or BiPAP machines, and nebulizers. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for maintenance and use. Depending on your health, your health care provider may recommend sterile water.

Change water filters. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and replacing all water filters. This includes whole-house water filters and point-of-use filters (tap or refrigerator water/ice maker).

Check the chlorine level in your pool or hot tub.

Chlorine can kill *Legionella* and other bacteria. Monitor regularly to keep chlorine at manufacturer-recommended levels. People at high risk for Legionnaires' disease should consider using only public New York State regulated pools and hot tubs, which are monitored on a regular basis.

Skip the fish tank or decorative fountain.

Devices that recirculate water are a risk for Legionnaires' disease.

Consider raising your hot water heater temperature. Hot water between 130-140°F kills *Legionella*, but also increases the risk of hot water burns. Mix hot and cold water at the tap before use to avoid injury.

Flush your hot water heater twice a year.

Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for maintenance.

Consider a water softener.

If you have hard water, a water softener will stop the buildup of scale in your piping that can provide a breeding ground for *Legionella*.

