

## Legionella Control International

### Legionella Safety Q&A - COVID-19

**Over the last few weeks, we have received lots of questions from people regarding the safe management of water systems during the COVID-19 outbreak.**

We have put together the following question and answer session that covers the most commonly asked questions, which may help others in similar situations.

#### **What guidance has been issued by the Health & Safety Executive?**

In addition to their current guidance documentation the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) has issued additional documents on its website that are pertinent to the safe management of water systems under the current precautions. These are well worth reading.

[Regulatory Activity During Coronavirus](#) outlines the approach HSE will be taking to regulation of occupational health and safety during the COVID-19 outbreak. Other risks, including Legionella risk, must still be managed during the COVID-19 outbreak.

- <https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/hse-regulatory-activity-during-coronavirus.htm>

#### **What about the maintenance of water features and other water systems that can present a legionella risk?**

The approach to all water systems should be based on risk and the need to run the water system. Water features are normally decorative and the expectation would be for these to be safely decommissioned during COVID-19 precautions.

Each should have start-up and shut-down procedures as part of their written scheme of control and these should be followed.

For most water features this would include cleaning, disinfection and draining to decommission. Followed by filling, cleaning, disinfection and sampling for recommissioning.

Water softeners, reverse osmosis purification systems and other similar plant installations are normally incorporated in a wider water system such as the pre-treatment for a cooling tower or steam boiler.

If the water system is still in use, the plant in question should be maintained and operated as normal while maintaining social distancing.

If the water system is not in use then the plant should be safely decommissioned with the rest of the system and recommissioned when needed.

The exact process of decommissioning and recommissioning will vary from system to system which is why it is important to have robust start-up and shut-down procedures in every written scheme of control.

For water softeners this may include disinfection of resin beds prior to reuse or other measures specific to that system.

### **Is on-site Legionella risk assessment essential?**

Under UK health and safety law all water systems should already have a legionella risk assessment in place.

It is likely that this risk assessment will now need to be reconsidered where buildings have low occupancy or where buildings are empty as this may be a significant change to the risk.

Dutyholders need to ensure their assessment of legionella risk is current and that includes the changing circumstances due to COVID-19.

Legionella risk assessment specialists such as Legionella Control International will be able to assist Dutyholders in reviewing their current risk assessment remotely and helping to develop interim control measures to address the changing risk.

While many buildings are closed there may also be an opportunity to survey and inspect water systems that would not normally be accessible.

Provided personal risk is managed and COVID-19 social distancing is observed, the current situation could be used beneficially.

### **Should water systems be automatically drained down if they are no longer in use?**

No, water systems should not automatically be drained down – the HSE's HSG274 does not advocate this.

Taking samples before re-opening is not going to address any issues in water systems.

Cleaning and disinfection or at the very least flushing is essential before sampling but all control measures should be derived from a detailed risk assessment.

### **Is there any specialist advice for dental surgeries that are shut down or operating at very low patient levels during the COVID-19 outbreak?**

We are working with dental specialists to bring out some guidance that will be published very shortly.

### **Are our testing labs operating and testing as normal?**

Yes, labs are operating and testing as normal.



**There is potential for multiple outbreaks of Legionnaires' disease following the COVID-19 outbreak if actions taken now are not carefully considered.**

**Remember, the Health and Safety at Work Act still applies and Dutyholders must continue to take reasonably practicable precautions to control the risks from legionella throughout this time.**

**Further advice and support**

If you require further advice or support on any of the issues raised here please contact us:

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