

Legionnaires' Disease Prevention in Households After Hurricane Helene

Legionnaires' disease is a very serious type of pneumonia (lung infection) caused by bacteria called *Legionella*. *Legionella* is naturally found in freshwater environments such as lakes and streams. It can also grow in man-made water sources such as showerheads, faucets, humidifiers, pools, hot tubs, decorative fountains, ice machines, misters, hoses, equipment that uses water (e.g., personal respiratory therapy machines) or other water features. *Legionella* in these man-made water sources become a health problem when small droplets of water that contain the bacteria get into the air and people breathe them in.

Most healthy people exposed to *Legionella* don't get sick. People at increased risk of getting sick include:

- People 50 years of age or older
- Current or former smokers
- People with chronic health conditions like cancer, lung disease, diabetes, kidney failure, liver failure
- People with weakened immune systems

How to reduce *Legionella* growth in household water systems



When faucets and showers have been out of use for more than a week, they should be flushed:

- a. Turn on the cold water fully and let it run for 2 minutes. Turn off the cold water.
- b. Turn on the hot water fully and run it until it starts to feel hot. Turn off the water.



Whenever buildup is visible, thoroughly clean or replace showerheads and faucet aerators (screens). You may need to remove the showerhead and hose and soak them in a solution, such as white vinegar, to remove buildup.



Keep hot water heaters set to a minimum of 120°F. Take extra precautions to mix cold and hot water using thermostatic mixing valves at the faucet or shower to avoid scalding. Proper hot water heater maintenance may include draining and flushing. Consider hiring a licensed plumber to perform this task.



Clean or replace all water filters including whole house (e.g., water softeners) and point-of-use filters (e.g., built-in sink or refrigerator filters) regularly.



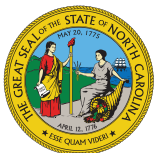
Always use distilled water in medical devices, like CPAP or BiPAP machines, and portable humidifiers. Do not use tap or bottled water. Clean the equipment parts and accessories regularly and replace any broken or damaged parts.



If you are at increased risk, consider avoiding high-risk activities such as using flushing showers or power washing tools, which may generate increased amounts of mist or water droplets in the air. If you cannot avoid these activities, consider wearing an N-95 respiratory or other well-fitting mask.

More information on:

- [CDC materials about Preventing Waterborne Disease at Home](#)
- [Legionnaires' disease factsheet](#)
- Contact information for local health departments: www.dph.ncdhhs.gov/contact/LHD



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