

## **RESIDENTS AT RISK OF LEGIONNAIRES' DISEASE:**

### **WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

Aged residents, residents with histories of pneumonia, residents who have had organ transplants, and residents whose immune systems are weakened are all especially vulnerable to the Legionella bacteria. The bacteria is not usually a problem for healthy people.

#### What is Legionella bacteria?

The Legionella bacteria is naturally occurring and found in our water supplies. The level of this bacteria in our personal homes is usually very low, because the water at home is not stagnant and water tank temperatures exceed 125 degrees F. The bacteria thrives in stagnant water. It is extremely resistant to chlorine. Shock chlorination, heat treatment, and wire brushing of its bio-slime will not permanently remove the bacteria growth: these methods only control it.

#### What is Legionnaires' Disease?

Legionnaires' Disease is a pneumonia that develops when we ingest contaminated water or inhale air borne contaminated water droplets from water spouts or showerheads.

#### How do licensed facilities' water supplies become contaminated?

Stagnant water in unused plumbing fixtures (such as showers, sinks, spa tubs, faucet aerators, hot water tanks, ice machines, and cooling towers) and supply lines abandoned after renovation allow the Legionella bacteria to grow and develop into bio-slime. The entire water supply system can become contaminated from a single source.

#### What can be done to prevent the risk of Legionnaires' Disease?

- Follow the guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control or ASHRAE.
- Identify any abandoned or unused plumbing lines and fixtures.
- Cap abandoned lines or install shut-off valves within 6 inches of an active line.
- Remove unused fixtures and cap or shut off the abandoned lines.
- Flush water lines (e.g., showers, toilets, sinks) regularly using both hot and cold water serving the fixtures. Some sources recommend weekly flushing and ASHRAE recommends monthly flushing.

- If serving residents with high risk for Legionnaires' Disease, remove, clean, and disinfect showerheads and faucet aerators monthly and hot water tanks and ice machines periodically.

What should be done if the facility's water supply is suspected of being contaminated with Legionella bacteria?

- Contact the local health department.
- Protect residents by removing the risk of drinking or inhaling contaminated water. Discontinue use of tap water for consumption or nebulizers, humidifiers, tub baths, and showers.
- Conduct a test of the water supply at distal locations.
- Disinfect the water supply system.
- Conduct post-test of water supply system.

*Many thanks of Jeff McManus and Pier-George Zanoni of LARA's Health Facilities Engineering Section for this information.*