

Re-opening your business

Advice about your
water supply



Re-opening your business – is your water ready?

During the coronavirus outbreak, many commercial businesses and domestic properties have had to temporarily close or significantly reduce their normal activities due to government restrictions. This could mean that the water has been sitting in your internal plumbing system for a number of weeks.

Making sure your water is safe to use

The main issue for any property that has been closed for a number of weeks is that the water in the internal pipe system could have become stagnated. Stagnation impacts the quality of the water and may pose a risk to health, particularly through the absorption of materials from the pipework or water borne pathogens such as Legionella which can grow in pipes or taps where there is reduced or low flow of water.

This may affect the safety of the drinking water, but also water for other uses including cleaning systems and ornamental water features. Legionella is a particular risk when the bacteria is released into the air in the form of splashes and sprays and inhaled.

In order to protect the health of your visitors, customers or employees, it's really important that you identify and mitigate these risks before you re-open.

If water usage in your building has been significantly reduced or unused for more than a week, we would recommend you take precautions to avoid water quality issues which could cause illness, or may be costly to fix at a later date. If you routinely shut your property for a significant length of time seasonally for other reasons you may already have a water safety plan that you can review and adapt for this situation.



This leaflet provides advice on what you need to consider to make sure your water is safe to use once your property or business reopens.

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Advice for commercial premises

Flushing your water system

Consider how water normally flows through your building. Check to see where the hot and cold water supplies are fed from - are there cold water tanks, hot water vessels, hot water circulation systems, point of use water heaters and outside taps?

Once you know this, it's a good idea to flush taps/outlets nearest those sources drawing fresh hot and cold water for a few minutes. Then close those outlets and systematically move through the building drawing fresh water as you go, working towards the furthest points away from those hot and cold sources. It's probably better to work on one system at a time but this can get complicated. If you're not sure then seek expert advice. Make sure that any appliances are operated as you move through the building.

Mains fed supplies

Buildings that are supplied direct from the water main under mains pressure are likely to have minimal stagnation as very little water is stored inside the building.

In these cases we would recommend purging your system by opening each outlet for at least two minutes. You should note the water temperature dropping as water from the underground water main reaches the tap. When flushing each outlet, spray should be avoided to reduce Legionella risk.

It may be a good idea to start from the outlets nearest to the incoming supply or main internal stop tap, and work through the building to the furthest parts.



Tank/storage fed supplies

Where supplies of cold water are stored it may be necessary to drain down and disinfect the tank. This will stop the water inside the tank (which could potentially be stagnated) from passing throughout the rest of your water system. We would recommend that you seek advice from a WaterSafe plumber who will be qualified to help you with this. Once the tank is clean and filled with fresh water, determine a flushing plan to draw water from outlets nearest that tank and work towards outlets furthest away.

To find an approved plumber visit: watersafe.org.uk

Hot water systems

Hot water systems are particularly associated with Legionella risk. We recommend taking specialist advice on testing requirements and disinfection of the system. Following disinfection, hot water should then be drawn systematically through the system (nearest to furthest outlets), until fresh hot water is drawn through for at least a minute at each hot outlet.

Industrial premises

Where water is used in part of your industrial process, you will need specialist advice tailored to your individual process needs.

If you are likely to have a significant increase in the amount of water which you will be using whilst carrying out these flushing activities, please contact us to discuss the best times to do this without disrupting water supplies to surrounding areas.

If you have an in-house water safety plan already in place, this will provide a good starting point in identifying where the water supply comes into your building, how it is distributed and which outlets are your highest risk.



A water safety plan should cover any outlet that uses water including:

Drinking water supplied to:

- Plumbed in water dispensers
- Ice dispensers
- Hot drink vending machines
- Carbonated drinks dispensers
- Food preparations areas
- Any tap that may be used for drinking water e.g. bathroom taps

Domestic hot & cold water:

- Hand basins
- Showers/bathing facilities
- Dishwashers and dishwashing sinks
- Washing machines

Clinical and industrial processes:

- Water baths
- Nebulisers
- Ultrasonic baths
- Dialysis

Any form of swimming pool, spa or hot tub

Water features

For further advice regarding water safety after a period of inactivity please visit:



Water UK:

www.water.org.uk/publication/recovering-drinking-water-supplies-in-buildings-and-networks-after-prolonged-inactivity/

Water Safety in Buildings:

www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/publications/9789241548106/en/

Advice for domestic-use properties

Many properties used for domestic purposes may have been empty for longer than normal due to the coronavirus restrictions. This may include second/holiday homes, and rental properties. Many businesses that routinely lease accommodation to others should already have a water safety plan, including an understanding of what to do when the property has been empty for some time.

If you need help with flushing or locating your main internal stop tap, contact a plumber via the WaterSafe website:

www.watersafe.org.uk



Domestic hot water sources

In a domestic hot water system the storage should be minimal. If your hot water system has been unused for a significant period of time we'd recommend that you run each of the hot water taps until fresh hot water comes

through for at least a minute. Ensure that the taps are safely disinfected.



1 min

If you've been away from your home

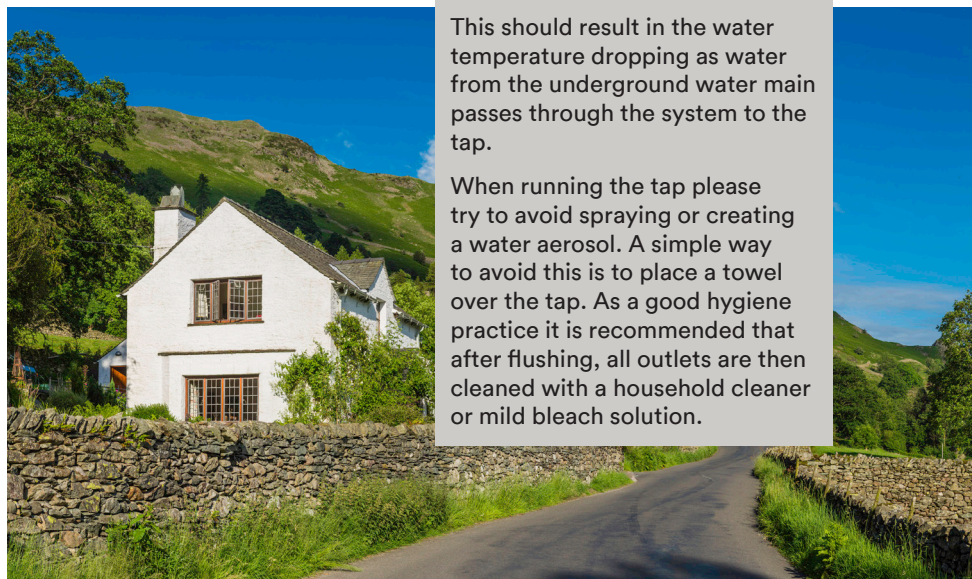
If you've been away from your home for a significant period of time we would recommend flushing the system to get rid of any stagnant water. You can do this by opening each cold water tap for at least two minutes before closing and moving on to the next. It may be a good idea to work from the taps nearest to the main internal stop tap and working through the home.



2 mins

This should result in the water temperature dropping as water from the underground water main passes through the system to the tap.

When running the tap please try to avoid spraying or creating a water aerosol. A simple way to avoid this is to place a towel over the tap. As a good hygiene practice it is recommended that after flushing, all outlets are then cleaned with a household cleaner or mild bleach solution.



Your questions answered

What can happen to my water system if it's been unused?

Water that has been held in your water storage tank or water pipes for longer than normal will start to deteriorate and become stagnant. This can cause taste, discolouration and odour issues but more importantly could result in your water being unsafe to use due to legionella. If this happens and you attempt to use the water system as normal then you could expose yourself and others to health risks.

What should I do if the water has an unusual taste, odour or appearance?

If your water supply has been unused or significantly reduced we would advise flushing of the system before use. See the section headed 'Flushing your water system' for guidance on this. If the problem persists following flushing and disinfection, please contact us.

Where can I find advice on managing my water system and Legionella control?

Please see our 'Helpful links' section opposite for where to go for advice and how to find a water hygiene expert.

Should I have a Legionella risk assessment?

In any complex water system it's beneficial to have an expert identify all parts of a water system and then establish schemes of control to manage each of those parts. This doesn't usually take long and will ensure that you have considered everything. If you are uncertain, then we would recommend requesting a

Legionella Risk Assessment before you do anything with your system.

To find a water hygiene expert visit:
www.legionellacontrol.org.uk

What if I don't want to carry out works on the water system?

As an employer you will have a duty of care to your employees and anyone visiting your site. The management of your water system falls under the COSHH Regulations and Health Safety at Work Act. If risks are not suitably mitigated, it's likely you would be held responsible should someone fall ill as a result.

There wasn't time to drain down the system before leaving the premises. What do I need to do?

Many businesses are in this position due to the lockdown guidance and have been unable to carry out routine treatment of their water systems. The important thing is that advice is followed before reinstating supplies to ensure that there are no risks to health. A WaterSafe plumber or a water hygiene expert should be able to support with draining down a storage tank, please see our 'Helpful links' section below.

We already have a legionella certificate, do we need to do anything?

Although it's great that you have risk assessed your premises previously, if this was prior to the supply being unused it is unlikely to account for this situation. The legionella risk assessor is likely to already understand the design of your water system and will be able to support with a plan to control legionella risks.

We have been regularly maintaining the water system. Is anything else required?

This depends on the size of your water storage and if the water inside it has been completely turned over at least once a week. Also consider whether all hot and cold outlets have been flushed at least once a week. It may be beneficial to flush the hot and cold outlets one more time and ensure that they are descaled before assessing the water quality. If you do not have a Legionella risk assessment it would be beneficial to contact an assessor for advice.

To find a water hygiene expert visit:
www.legionellacontrol.org.uk

How do I know when the outlet is drawing fresh water?

Water should appear to be clear and without any odour. For cold water systems the temperature should drop within a degree or two of the incoming supply to the building or tank when fresh water is being drawn. For hot water systems, the outlets should run remaining above 50°C (55°C in healthcare settings) for at least a minute.

Can someone help me to disinfect my water system?

There are a range of companies who can advise on the requirements tailored to your water system. Technical information can be obtained from BS8558 (2011) & BS8558 (2015). Please see our 'Helpful links' section opposite to find a water hygiene expert.



Helpful Links

Find a water hygiene expert:

www.legionellacontrol.org.uk

Legionella code of practice:

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l8.htm

The control of legionella bacteria in hot and cold water systems:

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/hsg274part2.pdf

Water safety in buildings:

www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/publications/9789241548106/en

Water fittings regulations:

www.wras.co.uk/consumers

Find an approved plumber:

www.watersafe.org.uk/

Looking after water in your home:

www.wras.co.uk/downloads/public_area/publications/public_-_in_page/water_in_the_home_2015.pdf



Contacting United Utilities

If you have an emergency with your water supply or wastewater services please call us on **0345 672 3723**.

If you have any queries about your bill or need to discuss your charges please contact your retailer direct. You can find contact details for your retailer at open-water.org.uk/find-your-current-retailer

Your retailer may also provide a range of additional water-related services to support your business.

We're all in the business of saving water

Small changes to how you use water in the workplace can make a big difference to your bills. Here's a few simple tips:

- **Employee awareness** - introduce water saving information, an employee suggestion scheme or arrange a water efficiency session to increase awareness amongst your employees.
- **Taps** – encourage employees to switch off taps and report dripping taps.
- **Hosepipes** – make sure hosepipes are switched off when not in use – they use more water in one hour than a family of four will use in a day.
- **Urinal flushing** - if replacing outdated equipment, using a control device can reduce water consumption by up to 70% by ensuring that flushing stops when the premises are not in use.
- **Leaking toilets** – check all your toilet areas regularly to make sure the cisterns are not leaking.
- **Showers** – if you provide shower facilities, consider using aerated showerheads to reduce water use.
- **Grounds** - thousands of litres of water can be wasted every day on grounds maintenance particularly during the summer months. Please try to limit hosepipe use as much as possible.
- **Meters** - find and regularly read your meters and sub meters as this will spot leaks quicker.
- **Water audits** – larger companies may benefit from employing professional consultants to review their water use. Your retailer may offer these services.

Visit unitedutilities.com/waterwise-business for further details.

Keep the sewers blockage free

Help to keep the sewers blockage free when your business re-opens.

Please avoid pouring fats, oils and grease down the drain, and only flush the three ps – pee, poo and toilet paper – down the toilet.

Remember, a sewer blockage could affect your business and be costly to fix. Make sure you're disposing of any oils and food waste in a responsible way to avoid blockages.

You can find more information at unitedutilities.com/thinkbeforeyoupour



DON'T

put cooking oil, fat or grease down the sink.



DON'T

pour waste oil, fat or grease down the drain.



DON'T

put food scrapings into the sink (place in the rubbish bin).