



Public Health
England

Food, Water and Environmental
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30th March 2020

Letter to all partners and stakeholders

Dear Colleagues,

Re: COVID-19 and Food Water and Environmental Microbiology Services from Public Health England

You will all be aware of the Government's advice on responding to the COVID-19 outbreak. Public Health England is a key responder to the outbreak, and the FW&E Microbiology Service has been active in supporting the PHE response to this emergency. We very much hope that this response has not affected the delivery of our testing services to you. However, as we move into the next phase of the response there will inevitably be some impact. We have now activated our business continuity plan and a major part of this related to the reprioritisation of our work. To do this we are proactively identifying, monitoring and managing risks and pressures within the FW&E Microbiology Services and escalating these appropriately when we have further information on the availability of staff, materials and transport provision. I am sure you will be working through a similar process, could you please tell us about your intentions for sampling during this challenging period, including if you have taken a decision to stop sampling activity. This will help us to optimise the management of our resources. We will work hard to continue to support all stakeholders and the important public health work performed by Local Authorities, Port Health Authorities, the NHS and others but we will need to prioritise effort.

Since the Government is now advising home working, it is timely to remind you of the *Legionella* risks in vacant properties where water is allowed to stagnate within water systems. As a general principle, outlets on hot and cold water systems should be used at least once a week to maintain a degree of water flow and to minimise the chances of stagnation. To manage the risks during non-occupancy, consideration should be given to implementing a suitable flushing regime or other measures such as draining the system if it is to remain vacant for long periods (see <https://www.hse.gov.uk/legionnaires/legionella-landlords-responsibilities.htm>). This guidance also applies to workplaces which become less occupied (such as out-patient wards). In addition, consideration is required of other water systems that are no longer in use, such as leisure, sports and swimming and spa pool facilities. We suggest that for these facilities, you should follow the procedures described in the Pool Water Treatment Advisory Group Code of Practice and this can be found at <https://www.pwtag.org/code-of-practice/>. Please note that we remain on hand to support you with any advice and guidance, so please do not hesitate to contact your local laboratory if you need any advice or support. Guidance has also been produced by the European Society for Clinical Microbiology and Infectious disease on managing Legionella in building water systems during the COVID-19 pandemic (https://www.escmid.org/fileadmin/src/media/PDFs/3Research_Projects/ESGLI/COVID_buidling_water_syst_em_guidance_27_3_20_v4_DS.pdf).

We intend to maintain regular contact with partners and stakeholders over the coming weeks as it becomes clearer what impact the outbreak will have on our service provision . In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact either the local laboratory or myself in the usual way.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim McLauchlin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jim McLauchlin
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Lead Public Health Microbiologist, Food, Water and Environmental Microbiology Services