

The Legionella Link

News from the Department of Health Legionella Team

January 2022, Edition 1

OFFICIAL

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Welcome

Welcome to the first edition of The Legionella Link e-newsletter published by the Legionella Team in the Public Health Division of the Department of Health.

Through this newsletter we will provide updates and useful information to keep you informed about regulating Legionella risks in Victoria.

This edition contains important information about managing the risks of Legionella during COVID-19 response, Automatic Mutual Recognition arrangements for RMP Auditors, and a reminder to keep cooling tower system and contact details up to date.

Feel free to forward the e-newsletter to anyone interested.

To receive the e-newsletter directly, provide your contact details to legionella@health.vic.gov.au or subscribe via our new website at <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/water/legionella-risk-management>

The new 'Department of Health'

Following a Machinery of Government change on 1 February 2021, the Department of Health and Human Services became two departments; the Department of Health (DH) and the Department of Families Fairness and Housing (DFFH).

The Legionella Team is part of the Department of Health.

Our new website

We have upgraded our website! It has a great new look and is mobile friendly for easy browsing.

The new website is the easiest way to access information and learn about the legal responsibilities of owners of any land on which there is a cooling tower system, including:

- [How Legionella risks are regulated in Victoria](#)
- [Registration of cooling tower system](#)
- [Notification to the Department of Health of a Legionella detection in a cooling tower system.](#)
- [Develop and implement a cooling tower Risk Management Plan](#)
- [Having the Risk Management Plan independently audited every 12 months.](#)
- [Cooling tower system registration fees](#)

Take a look at the revised Legionella website at: <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/water/legionella-risk-management>

Managing the risk of Legionella during COVID-19 response.

Cooling tower systems.

The risk of Legionella growth in cooling tower systems increases if the system has not been used. Compliance with the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019 ensures cooling tower systems are safe when returning buildings into operation.

If a cooling tower system has been shut down for greater than one month, the responsible person must ensure that:

1. a chlorine-compatible bio-dispersant is added to the recirculating water; and
2. the recirculating water is disinfected; and
3. the interior of each cooling tower in the cooling tower system is cleaned; and
4. the recirculating water is re-disinfected.

The department recommends that any cooling tower system that has been shut down for any amount of time should be reviewed. Further details about the review process is available on the website at:

<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/water/cooling-tower-system-management-during-covid-19-response>

Water delivery system (shower systems)

There is an increased risk of Legionella growth in water delivery systems (e.g. shower systems) if they are not used, for example in communal facilities that have remained closed for an extended period. Stagnant (warm) water in unused systems may provide conditions that contribute to Legionella growth.

It is recommended that showers that have been unused for 7 days or more are flushed before use. More details on how the water delivery systems should be flushed is on our website at:

<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/water/legionella-and-water-delivery-systems>

Automatic mutual recognition – RMP auditors

If you are a certified cooling tower risk management plan (RMP) auditor in another state or territory, you can work as an auditor in Victoria under the Automatic Mutual Recognition (AMR) scheme.

AMR allows a person who is licenced or registered for an occupation in one jurisdiction to be considered registered to perform the same activities in another jurisdiction, without the need to go through further application processes or pay additional registration fees.

Under the AMR arrangements, workers from any jurisdiction that have joined the AMR scheme are able to work in Victoria. However, they are required to notify the department using an online form on our website. We will soon publish a public register of workers who have notified us that they are intending to work in Victoria under the AMR scheme.

To find out how it will work, who is eligible and how to notify the Victorian Department of Health for AMR, read the information on the [Legionella website](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/water/automatic-mutual-recognition-rmp-auditors) at: <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/water/automatic-mutual-recognition-rmp-auditors>

Reminder to keep contact details up to date

The Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 (Act) requires all land owners with a cooling tower on their land to register those cooling towers with the Department of Health (department) **and** to notify the department in writing, within 30 days, of a change in ownership, address or other contact details.

It is very important that cooling tower system details are up to date on the department's record system. This ensures the Legionella Team contacts the right person if a cooling tower needs to be disinfected in response to a case or outbreak of Legionnaires Disease in the area. Disinfecting a cooling tower is essential in preventing people from becoming ill with Legionnaires Disease.

Facility managers change, and if records are not up to date, this may delay important steps being taken to protect public health.

It is important the department is notified of the following:

- change of registration holder's contact details including mailing addresses, mobile phone numbers, and email addresses;
- transfer of ownership of land where cooling system(s) is/are located;
- transfer of ownership of cooling tower system;
- addition of a cooling tower to a cooling tower system;
- removal of a cooling tower from a cooling tower system;
- relocation of a cooling tower system;
- change of registration duration (1, 2 or 3 year duration).

A [cooling tower system details change](#) form can be downloaded from the Legionella website and emailed to the Legionella Team.

Preparing for our new registration system

We are about to start work on replacing the software that we use for the registration of cooling tower systems and approval of RMP auditors.

The new system is designed to manage licensing and registration functions. It will allow you to maintain your own contact details or those of your employer, download copies of your registration as well as many other functions. It will allow you to make payments by credit card or BPay.

Further details will be provided in the lead up to the changeover of the system through our e-newsletter. We will be requesting responsible persons to register on the new system with their personal email address, similar to the way you shop on-line from home or deal with other government departments. Your unique personal email address will form an important part of the system's security and must not be shared with someone else in your company.

The system will give us improved reporting and geocoding of sites which are critical when we need to investigate cases and particularly outbreaks of legionnaires' disease.

We are aiming to implement the new system around the middle of next year.

Health warning to gardeners using potting mix

Legionella longbeachae is a bacteria commonly found in potting mix that can cause Legionnaire's disease, a rare form of pneumonia. The ingredients and dampness of potting mix make it the ideal breeding ground for bacteria. This disease is caused by inhaling or by spreading the bacteria from hand to mouth after handling potting mix, soil or compost. Early symptoms resemble the flu and begin to appear two to ten days after exposure.

Not everyone who comes in contact with the bacteria is affected, however the risk of disease is increased with age, smoking and in people with weakened immune systems.

Gardeners can minimise the risk of exposure of Legionnaire's disease from soil, compost or potting mix by taking the following precautions:

- **Always wear a mask and gloves** when handling soil, compost or potting mix
- **Wash hands with soap and water** after handling soil and before eating, drinking, smoking or placing hands near the face or mouth.
- Follow the manufacturer's safety instructions on the potting mix bag.
- Store bags of potting mix in a cool dry place. When stored in the sunlight, the temperature inside the bag can increase, creating an ideal environment for Legionella bacteria to grow
- Open bags in a well-ventilated space
- Open bags of composted potting mix slowly, directing the opening away from the face to avoid inhaling the mix. Wet the soil to reduce dust when potting plants
- Water gardens and composts gently, using a low-pressure hose
- Avoid breathing in droplets of water from dripping pot plants, including hanging baskets, and when watering plants
- Anyone with concerns about their health, should seek medical attention.

Read the department's Deputy Chief Health Officer's [health advisory released in November 2020](#).

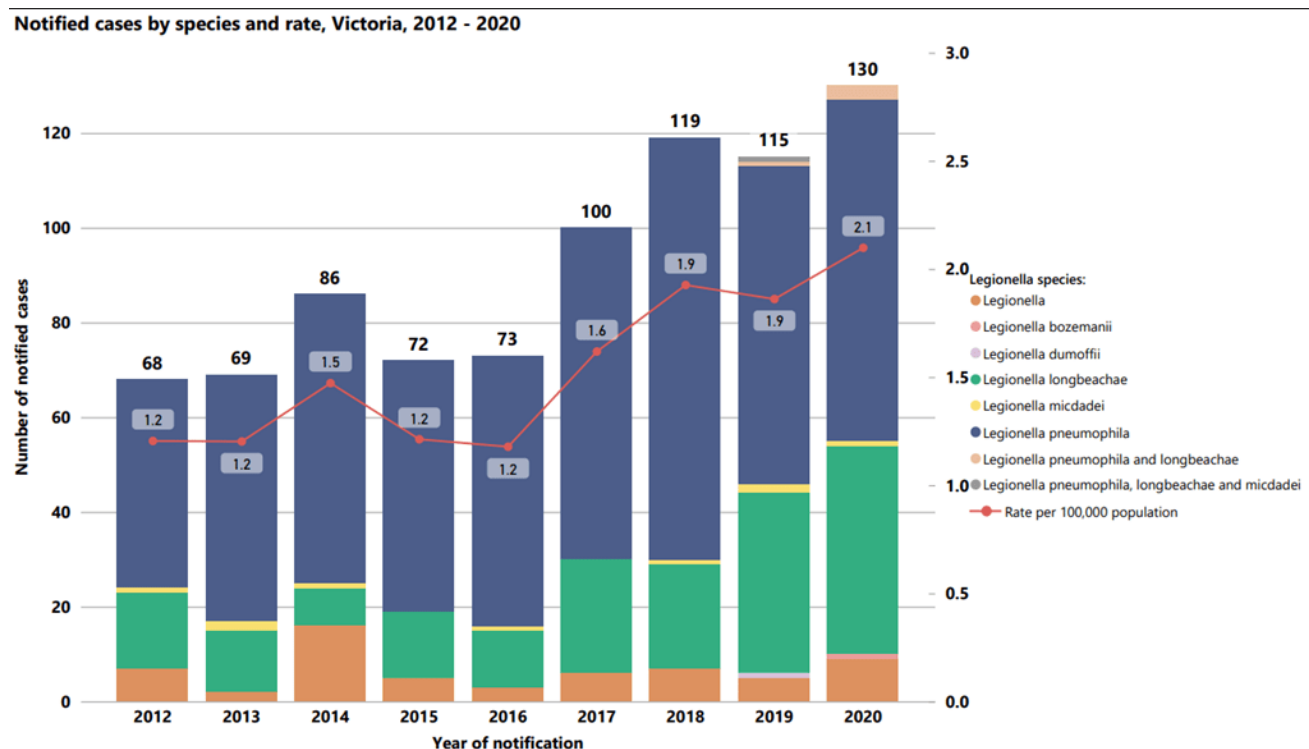
Visit the [Better Health Channel](#) for more information about Legionnaire's disease.

Infectious disease interactive report

The Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019 require that all cases of legionellosis are notified to the department. The department publishes this data in the interactive infectious disease report on the department’s website at <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/infectious-diseases/interactive-infectious-disease-reports>. The interactive report is updated daily so remember to check back often as we continue to add new reports.

The below graph shows the number of cases of Legionellosis notified to the Department of Health each year from 2012 until 2020 and the rate of legionellosis per 100,000 population. The number of cases each year has increased from 68 in 2012 to 130 in 2020. The rate per 100,000 population has increased from 1.2 in 2012 to 2.1 in 2020. *Legionella pneumophila* cases are commonly associated with cooling tower systems.

Figure 1: Notified cases of Legionellosis, Victoria, 2012-2020.



If you have any questions about the interactive infectious disease report, please email the Legionella Team at legionella@health.vic.gov.au.

Number of cooling tower registrations

The department assigns a registration number for every site that has cooling towers on them. Then assigns a registration number for each cooling tower on the site. Some sites have multiple cooling tower systems registered on them. This graph shows that the decline in number of registered cooling towers in Victoria is starting to slow.

Year	Number of registered cooling towers	Number of sites registered
2021 YTD	2822	1656

2020	2822	1660
2019	2812	1665
2018	2915	1762
2017	2989	1771
2016	3076	1831
2015	3170	1883
2014	3239	1921

Our new email addresses

Our email addresses have changed to '@health.vic.gov.au'. Please amend your records to ensure we receive the emails you send us and add us to your contact list as a trusted source to ensure you receive emails from us.

Phone hours

Our phone hours are from 9.00am to 1.00pm, Monday to Friday. This allows our Registration and Licensing Team dedicated time in the afternoons to process registration applications and respond to email enquiries.

Contact us

Direct all enquiries to the Legionella Team

Phone: 1300 767 469

Email: legionella@health.vic.gov.au

Website: <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/water/legionella-risk-management>

Further Information

For further information email legionella@health.vic.gov.au or visit our website at

<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/water/legionella-risk-management>

Feedback

Has this newsletter been useful to you? Please contact us by email at legionella@health.vic.gov.au to share your comments with us or make any suggestions as to what you would like to see in future newsletters.

To receive this document in another format, phone 1300 767 469 , using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or [email the Legionella Team](mailto:legionella@health.vic.gov.au) < legionella@health.vic.gov.au>.

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