

Frequently Asked Questions

Onsite Legionella Testing for Emergency Safety Showers & Eye Washes



What is Legionnaires' disease and how is it caused?

Legionnaires' disease is a severe form of pneumonia which causes potentially fatal complications to occur within human lungs. Legionnaire's disease is not contagious. The infection is contracted when bacteria are inhaled into the lungs in the form of tiny contaminated water droplets or aerosols. These aerosols are produced where water is splashed or sprayed.

Why do I need to test my emergency safety showers and eye wash units for Legionella?

Every employer has a duty of care to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its employees, this specifically includes controlling the risks from a range of hazardous substances, including Legionella bacteria. Failure to implement proper control systems or to carry out frequent risk assessments can lead to heavy fines and huge reputational damage. Negligence alone is enough for a duty holder to be prosecuted.

The Water Management Society stress that the risk of contracting Legionnaires' disease from an emergency safety shower and eye wash should be kept in perspective. It is a secondary consideration and must not diminish the function of the primary objective of the unit – to protect an individual in the event of an accidental exposure to hazardous chemicals.

Legionella will grow in any water system, there are certain traits associated with safety showers and eye wash units where there is a risk factor:

- Bacteria multiply if the water temperature is between 20 C and 45 C
- Sediment, sludge or nutrients support microbial growth
- Biofilms support the potential for Legionella survival and growth
- Areas of stagnation on the water system increase the risk of microbial growth

Further guidance can be found via the Health and Safety Executive and The Water Management Society websites.

What can I do to reduce the risk of Legionella bacteria within my emergency safety shower and eye wash units?

Weekly activation of your safety shower and eye wash units is essential and recommended in international and European standards. Not only can you check that your equipment is functioning properly, but the activation will also flush the pipes of any sediment and decrease the risk of stagnant water in the system.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recommends the following:

Monthly:

Inspect water storage tanks. Hughes also recommends emergency tank showers are emptied and chlorinated every six to twelve months. Contact the service team for more information.

At least quarterly:

Clean and disinfect shower heads, nozzles, roses, 'Y' strainers, and water storage tanks.

At least every six months:

Flush through and purge to drain ensuring three to five times the volume of water in the stagnant zone is drawn off.

For further information, refer to the HSE Approved Code of Practice and guidance on regulations (L8) for 'Legionnaires Disease – The control of Legionella bacteria in water systems'.

Can the Legionella test be performed at the same time as my scheduled service?

Yes, on-site Legionella testing should be booked at the time of booking your full service. Our service engineers can then ensure they are equipped with enough tests for the safety showers you require testing across your site.

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How does the test work?

The test detects Legionella pneumophila SG1, the most dangerous strain which causes around 88% of all outbreaks. Using well established lateral flow test technology it works just like a pregnancy test; one line indicates a negative result and two lines means a positive result. This type of test is most widely used in clinical settings for the detection of Legionnaires disease in humans. The same methodology has now been optimised and applied to detect Legionella in environmental water samples.

How quickly will I get the results?

The Hughes service team use the world's fastest field Legionella (SG1) bacteria test, providing immediate results on-site in just 25 minutes allowing for a fast response plan to help duty holders mitigate risks. (In comparison, traditional lab culture testing methods take 7-10 days to produce results, have a low recovery rate and ignore some dangerous forms of the bacteria)

How accurate are the results?

The results are more accurate than a lab test for detecting the strain that causes almost all cases and outbreaks, Legionella pneumophila SG1.

What happens if the Legionella test is positive?

If a positive result is recorded the Hughes service engineer will perform extended chlorination of the safety shower (the tank or the shower components) or eye wash. 7-10 days later Hughes will need to perform another test to establish whether Legionella pneumophila bacteria has re-entered the unit. During this time, you will not be able to use the safety shower/eye wash and an alternative must be put in place. Speak to our sales team regarding short-term hire of a Hughes safety shower.

How regularly should a Legionella test be performed?

The Health and Safety Executive's Approved Code of Practice regarding controlling Legionella bacteria in water systems recommends that cold water storage tanks should be inspected annually, this should include cleaning and disinfection. This is, of course, in addition to your weekly activation test.

I already perform lab tests, is this onsite test the right method for me?

Lab culture tests remain widely specified in regulations. If you must test your water system for regulatory reasons, then a lab culture test is likely to be required. There are limitations to lab testing such as 7-10 days to receive a result potentially putting employees at risk, inability to detect Viable but Non-Culturable Bacteria (VBNC), risk of damage to the sample during transportation and low recovery rates. It is clear that doing the bare minimum is no longer enough to protect your workforce.

If you have any additional questions please contact the Hughes service team via email at service@hughes-safety.com or call +44 (0)161 430 6618.

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