



Community of Christ

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Compromised Water Quality Following Prolonged Building Shutdowns

When buildings are closed down for long periods of time a lot of water is idle in plumbing systems. Scientists say this can pose health risks. Stagnant water can accumulate heavy metals and harmful bacteria including the kind that causes sometimes fatal Legionnaires' disease.

The Environmental Protection Agency and other health agencies have issued guidance on how shuttered facilities can safeguard their water systems and prepare to reopen for use.

Stagnant water and potential health hazards:

- Harmful bacteria, such as *Legionella*, may grow and be transmitted in water droplets or steam (shower, fine spray), dangerous when inhaled
- Increased plumbing corrosion causing increased metal levels in the water, including lead depending on plumbing
- Decreased disinfectant residual allowing disease-causing organisms (bacteria and viruses) to grow contaminating drinking/cooking water

Take steps to reduce risk:

- **Run all water fixtures weekly.** While buildings are shutdown or minimally used, run all water fixtures for 10 – 30 minutes each week to refresh building pipe water. Guidance from Environmental Science Policy & Research Institute: [how to flush the water in your building \[pdf\]](#).
- **Check your hot water system.** Set your water heater to at least 140 degrees F. When flushing hot water taps, run the water until it reaches its highest temperature. **HAZARD WARNING: 140 degrees is very hot. Hot water can cause burns to skin at 120 degrees. Install anti-scald valves or faucets to prevent burns.**
- **Take steps before reopening.** Follow CDC's eight step plan before reopening building. Use personal protective equipment when performing building maintenance.

Links and resources:

- **CDC's eight steps:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/building-water-system.html>
- **Water quality risks from non-use** (Legionnaires' disease): <https://www.tvwd.org/water-quality/page/risks-water-quality-non-use-prevent-legionella>
- **Personal Protective equipment:** <https://www.osha.gov/personal-protective-equipment>