Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board

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Redundant water pipes – Legionella bacteria

Redundant pipework left by plumbers is considered to be a persistent and often critical source of risk within our water systems.

When piping is left unused or rarely used, it does not have a regular flow of water running through it. This can lead to stagnant water sitting in the pipe works. Stagnant pipes provide the ideal environment for Legionella bacteria to grow.

When Legionella bacteria forms in the dead-legs of a redundant water pipe, it can be drawn into the flowing water, which leads to the active outlets in the building. From here, people can breathe in the mist from the water which contains the bacteria and get Legionnaires disease.

The symptoms of Legionnaires' disease include a persistent cough, chest pain, a fever, difficulty breathing and other flu-like symptoms. Those more at risk include people with an impaired immune system, older people, smokers, and those with chronic respiratory disorders.

Plumbers should always remove redundant pipes where possible. If it isn't possible to remove the redundant pipe, plumbers should keep the dead leg as short as possible.

As the plumber, it is your responsibility to keep your client safe. If your client is hesitant due to the amount of work or costs involved in addressing these issues, explain to them the potential health risks they face.

For questions about Legionella see the Ministry of Health guidance on their website.