

After COVID-19 Closures, Stagnant On-Property Plumbing Systems in Commercial Buildings Pose Serious Health Risks

Water Pipes and Fixtures in Buildings Must be Thoroughly Flushed to Avoid Legionnaires' and Other Illnesses

Because COVID-19 stay-at-home orders forced many commercial buildings to close, the water in these facilities' plumbing systems can become stagnant – leading to serious health risks for returning employees and occupants. Howard County Bureau of Utilities is urging building or property managers to thoroughly flush their water pipes in preparation for their reopening.

Stagnant water can lead to bacterial growth such as Legionella (cause of Legionnaires' disease), as well as other serious illnesses. Flushing a building's water system will replace any stagnant water and will help ensure safe, clean water continues to flow.

Steps for reopening a building include:

- Notify all building occupants not to use or consume water until flushing is complete;
- Remove and clean all aerators (leave aerators off during flushing); clean all faucets and showerheads; discard any accumulated ice;
- Flush hot and cold water through all points of use (e.g., showers and sink faucets);
- Flushing may need to occur in segments (e.g., floors and individual rooms) in large buildings;
- Perform flushing with proper ventilation and personal protective equipment. Care should be taken to avoid inhaling water droplets, especially from shower heads; and
- Other water-using devices, such as water tanks, may require other cleaning steps in addition to flushing.

Property owners are responsible for maintaining the quality of water in building plumbing systems and internal water quality. Consult a [licensed plumber](#), [licensed engineer](#), or personnel that specializes in building water management for assistance with carrying out these recommendations.

Additional resources:

- [EPA Guidance on Maintaining or Restoring Water Quality in Buildings with Low or No Use](#)

- [EPA Checklist for Restoring Water Quality in Buildings for Reopening](#)
- [CDC Guidance for Reopening Buildings After Prolonged Shutdown or Reduced Operation](#)
- [American Water Works Association flushing instructions](#)
- [List of laboratories certified by Maryland Department of the Environment](#)