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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Important Steps to Take Before your Business Reopens  
Maintaining your Water System to Prevent Legionnaires' disease**

Akron, Ohio – Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, many buildings have sat empty or underused. Before reopening your business, it is important to make sure that your building is safe for people to return. One area of concern is the water system. If your building has not been used at its normal capacity, there is a good chance that there is standing, or stagnant water inside of the pipes. Stagnant water creates ideal conditions for harmful bacteria, such as *Legionella*, to grow and spread. If a person breathes in the *Legionella* bacteria through airborne water droplets or mist, it could make them ill with a respiratory illness called Legionnaires' disease. Symptoms of Legionnaires' disease can include cough, shortness of breath, fever, muscle ache, and headaches.

Based on the recent guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), businesses should follow these steps before opening their building back up:

- ✓ **Ensure your water heater is properly set and maintained**
  - All maintenance activities should be done according to the manufacturer instructions. Some manufacturers may recommend draining the water heater if it has not been in use for a while.
  - Make sure your water heater is set to at least 120°F. Temperatures higher than this can further reduce the risk of *Legionella* growth, but be careful, if it is set above 130°F, it could cause burning.
- ✓ **Flush your water system**
  - Flush both hot and cold water through all points of use (sink faucets, showers, etc.). Flushing the water will replace the old, stagnant water with fresh water. Flushing may need to occur in parts depending on the size of the facility and the pressure of the water.
  - Flush cold water first. Flush hot water until it reaches its highest temperature.
  - If you are unfamiliar on how the plumbing in the building works, consider contacting a professional for help.
- ✓ **Clean and disinfect devices that use water and water features**
  - Clean the plumbing fixtures that can produce sprays, such as showerheads and faucets. Ensure that there is no visible slime or film on drinking fountains, ice machines, humidifiers, etc. Follow manufacturer guidelines for cleaning.





- For water features such as decorative fountains, clean as instructed by the manufacturer and measure the disinfectant levels, if used.
- ✓ **Ensure hot tubs/spas are safe for use**
  - Perform a hot tub/spa disinfection procedure before use. See the CDC guidelines on this, starting at step 4: <https://www.cdc.gov/legionella/downloads/hot-tub-disinfection.pdf>
- ✓ **Ensure cooling towers are clean and well maintained**
  - Some large buildings use cooling towers as part of their air conditioning system. If your building has cooling towers, ensure that they are maintained (including start-up and shut-down procedures) per manufacturer guidelines and industry best practices. Ensure that the tower and basin are free of visible slime or biofilm before use.
  - If the tower appears well-maintained, perform an online disinfection procedure. Guidance for this can be found here: <http://www.cti.org/downloads/WTP-148.pdf>
- ✓ **Ensure safety equipment such as sprinkler systems, eye wash stations, and safety showers are clean and well-maintained**
  - Regularly flush, clean, and disinfect these systems according to manufacturers' specifications
- ✓ **Maintain your water system**
  - Consider contacting your local water utility to learn about any recent disturbances in the water supply. You can also ask if standard checkpoints near the building or at the meter to the building have recently been checked.
  - After your water system has returned to normal, take measures to ensure the risk of bacterial growth is reduced by routinely checking water quality parameters including temperature, pH, and disinfectant levels.
  - Create a Water Management Program for your water system to reduce the risk for *Legionella* growth. See the CDC's toolkit on how to develop a plan that's suitable for your facility: <https://www.cdc.gov/legionella/wmp/toolkit/index.html>

**Note:** If it is available, it may be a good idea to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) such as eye, face, respiratory, hand, and foot protection to protect you from any possible exposure.

For additional information on *Legionella* control and prevention, visit [https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/legionnairesdisease/control\\_prevention.html](https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/legionnairesdisease/control_prevention.html)

For more information about coronavirus in Summit County visit <https://www.scph.org/covid-19>.  
If you have questions, call the COVID-19 Call Line at (330) 926-5795. The call line is open from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. M-F.

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