

F.J. van Hout, F. Franchimon, J.E.M.H. van Bronswijk. Floor heating, cold water system, and resulting *Legionella* disease risks for older persons. *Gerontechnology* 2008; 7(2):122. In the Netherlands, 45% of older persons (65+) live in apartments. An increasing number of apartments is equipped with floor heating to achieve added thermal comfort. Since the incidence of Legionnaire's disease is 8 times higher among older adults (65+) as compared to the 15-45 yrs cohort, it is clear that we should take special care of *Legionella* abatement for the older cohorts¹. Another trend in housing construction is the use of polyethylene (PEX) piping for potable water systems instead of copper ones. The threshold temperature for noxious *Legionella* growth on PEX is lower (20°C) as compared to copper surfaces (25°C)². Since potable water piping runs through the same floors as the floor heating system, an additional risk for *Legionella* growth arises. In this study we investigate if the renewed use of copper piping can significantly reduce the additional risk of floor heating in dwellings for older adults. **Methods** Two apartment buildings are studied, each with 8 apartments equipped with floor heating. One building contains copper piping, the other PEX ones. Both construction and building services adhere to the Dutch Building Code, including a distance of at least 15 cm between potable water and heating piping in the floor concrete. Temperature of the cold water system is measured during 7 successive days and in each apartment one water sample is taken and analysed for *Legionella pneumophila* (detection limit 23 CFU/100ml)³. Water use is assessed with a questionnaire. With the Kruskal Wallis test differences in *Legionella* concentrations are evaluated. **Results and discussion** In all apartments the temperature of the cold water system exceeded 20°C for more than 80% of the time, and 25°C for more than 40%, indicating micro environments suitable for *Legionella* growth. In both the copper system and the PEX system *Legionella* was present above the detection limit, but the concentration of *Legionella* on PEX was significant higher. The use of copper piping reduces the risks for Pontiac fever and Legionnaire's disease by 30%. **Conclusions** Copper piping will decrease the additional risk of floor heating for the development of *Legionella* related disease, and should be advocated in dwellings inhabited by older persons.

References

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Keywords: legionnaire's disease, potable-water systems, floor heating, copper, plastic
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