



Public Water Systems and Novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19)

Frequently Asked Questions

March 2020

Can COVID-19 be transmitted in drinking water?

- The COVID-19 virus has not been detected in drinking water. If a water supplier is meeting all current standards it is considered safe to drink.
- People with COVID-19 spread it to other people through the droplets in their sneeze or cough, and people nearby breathe the droplets. This can happen when someone is close to a sick person, usually within six feet. Rarely, people might catch COVID-19 by touching a surface that a person with the infection coughed or sneezed on, and then touching their own mouth, nose or eyes.

What extra precautions can water suppliers take?

- Identify critical functions, staff, backups and remote work procedures. These considerations should be included in all water supplier's required emergency response plans.
- Verify that the supply of parts, equipment, and water treatment chemicals is uninterrupted.
- As needed, prioritize actions and work based on public health considerations. For example, ensuring continuity of treatment operations including daily checks of filtration operation, turbidity, disinfection CT and chlorine residual, critical maintenance, and collection of samples for acute contaminants like bacteria and nitrate.
- Encourage good hygiene practices amongst staff.

What if my water system's operators are not able to fulfill operational duties and need assistance during this public health emergency?

- Operators should prioritize ensuring that critical treatment is operating properly, such as coagulation, filtration and disinfection. If not able to verify adequate treatment, discuss the potential need for a public notice with your regulator.
- ALL public water systems should consider signing the Mutual Aid Agreement, as well as the Shared Worker Agreement addendum, through the Oregon Water / Wastewater Agency Response Network (ORWARN). Other ORWARN members may be able to assist other water

suppliers whose capabilities are overwhelmed, as long as these agreements are in place. There are no fees. These agreements can be found at <https://orwarn.org>.

- Oregon Association of Water Utilities (<https://oawu.net/>) may also be able to assist.
- Short-term and limited assistance may also be provided by the drinking water program Circuit Rider (<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HEALTHYENVIRONMENTS/DRINKINGWATER/OPERATIONS/Pages/circuitrider.aspx>).
- If other resources are not available and a water system finds they may be unable to continue to supply safe water, they should contact their county emergency manager so the issue can be forwarded to the State Emergency Operations Center, as appropriate.

Should my water system add a disinfectant to help combat COVID-19?

Many water systems already continuously add a disinfectant such as chlorine to drinking water. Adding a disinfectant specifically due to COVID-19 concerns is not warranted. For any system considering permanently adding a disinfectant for any reason, DWS must approve plans and equipment in advance.

Will DWS issue a violation to my water system if operators are ill and unable to collect samples or my lab is closed or lacks the capacity to analyze my samples?

In general, DWS will continue to apply the monitoring and reporting requirements as specified in the rules. However, in cases when water systems are unable to collect or report samples due to operator illness or capacity issues associated with the lab, please notify DWS at compliance.dw@dhsosha.state.or.us. DWS will evaluate the situation and determine whether violations should be issued. DWS will prioritize public health protection in responding to water quality issues.

What if a water supplier is unable to collect samples in people's homes, either bacteria samples or lead and copper samples, due to COVID-19 concerns?

During an emergency, we still expect water suppliers to take bacteria samples from representative locations within the distribution system. Samples may have to be collected from locations outside the home or alternative locations to avoid going into people's homes. However, failure to sample the distribution system could create another health risk to the public.

If the state of Oregon closes state office buildings, how will I contact DWS?

Water system operators: Contact DWS the way you normally would. If working from home, staff will have access to their voicemail, and hopefully email. If uncertain, contact our general phone number, 971-673-0405. We will prioritize immediate public health concerns and return calls as soon as we are able.

To submit lab data and operating reports:

- By email (preferred): send pdf of results to dwp.dmce@dhsosha.state.or.us

- By mail:
Drinking Water Services
PO Box 14350
Portland, OR 97293-0350
- By fax: 971-673-0694
Note that there may be some delays with entering of data received via postal mail or FAX.

Labs: See above. For water quality results over a maximum contaminant level, send to dwp.dmce@dhsosha.state.or.us with subject line starting with “Attention.”

General Public: Contact our general phone number, 971-673-0405. We will prioritize immediate public health concerns and return calls as we are able.

Should people stock up on bottled water?

While it is recommended that all households have an emergency supply of water available, there is no reason to believe that water interruptions will occur due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Encourage your customers to stay informed through your water supplier social media or alerts.

Can tap water be used to disinfect COVID-19 on surfaces and fresh produce?

For cleaning surfaces at home, tap water alone is insufficient. Follow recommendations provided by CDC, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/home/cleaning-disinfection.html> . For fresh produce, the Food and Drug Administration recommends using flowing tap water to mechanically remove debris and organisms from produce.

Where can I find additional information?

- Oregon Health Authority: www.healthoregon.org/coronavirus
- US Environmental Protection Agency: <https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-drinking-water-and-wastewater>
- Center for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/water.html>
- World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/water-sanitation-hygiene-and-waste-management-for-covid-19>