



# Water and COVID-19

*This page will be updated as new questions and information become available*

## Water and COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

### Where can I go for up-to-date information about COVID-19 and water?

The EPA has a new [COVID-19 page](#) with information on many of the subjects addressed by this FAQ.

### Can COVID-19 be transmitted through water or wastewater?

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), “coronaviruses are susceptible to the same disinfection conditions in community and healthcare settings as other viruses, so current disinfection conditions in wastewater treatment facilities are expected to be sufficient. This includes conditions for practices such as oxidation with hypochlorite (i.e., chlorine bleach) and peracetic acid, as well as inactivation using UV irradiation.” You can find the CDC’s page on COVID-19 and municipal water [here](#).

### Should wastewater workers be doing anything differently to keep themselves safe on the job?

[According to the CDC](#) and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), there is no evidence that wastewater workers need to take additional precautions. Workers should follow [routine practices to prevent exposure to wastewater](#), including using the engineering and administrative controls, safe work practices, and personal protective equipment normally required for work tasks when handling untreated wastewater.

### What do we do if we experience chemical shortages? If we can’t find bleach?

If we become aware of specific shortages or issues commonly facing water and wastewater systems, we will keep both the COWARN network and this fact sheet updated.

During all kinds of resource shortages, whether of supplies or labor, utilities should utilize the [CoWARN network](#). CoWARN is an organization that facilitates mutual aid and resource sharing between water and wastewater utilities, and it is free to join. Once a utility has signed the mutual aid agreement and becomes a member, they can “activate CoWARN” which will send out an email to all 162 CoWARN members with a request for help. Members will then respond if they are able to offer assistance. Often it is easy, quick, and inexpensive to get equipment and personnel help from a neighboring utility.

### What kinds of operational impacts should we expect from a pandemic situation? What can we do to be prepared?

COVID-19 has not been declared a pandemic in the United States, but all public water systems should plan for continuity of operations during a pandemic or any other type of emergency (e.g., flooding or forest fires). During a severe pandemic, the most serious expected challenge for public water systems would be absenteeism from employees who are sick, who are taking care of others, or who must stay home for other reasons. Planning for



# COVID-19 in Drinking Water and Wastewater

staffing shortages – both at your plant and at businesses you rely on – is one of the most critical things you can do to ensure continuity of operations.

## What can we do if we experience labor shortages?

It is good for organizations to have a formal labor shortage plan detailing how they will remain in operation if a substantial portion of the workforce is unavailable. These plans should include procedures for augmenting staff as needed due to incapacitation or loss of available workforce. Also, mutual aid may be available through CoWARN, so it is important to make sure you are a member. Please see the Water Information Sharing and Analysis Center's [Business Continuity Planning for Water Utilities](#) guidance document for more information on continuity planning.

## Are public utilities still expected to follow their sampling schedules during an emergency? What adjustments are we allowed to make to keep our workers safe?

During an emergency, we still expect utilities to take chlorine and bacteria samples from representative locations within the distribution system. They may have to get samples from outside spigots, hydrants, etc. to avoid going into people's homes, but to not sample distribution could create another health risk to the public.

It may be a good idea to identify alternative locations now so that you would be ready to use them in an emergency

## Are public utilities expected to uphold the routine maintenance of system facilities (for example, tank cleaning) during an emergency?

We encourage water systems to continue doing regularly scheduled maintenance, including tank cleaning. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "coronaviruses are susceptible to the same disinfection conditions in community and healthcare settings as other viruses, so current disinfection conditions in wastewater treatment facilities are expected to be sufficient. This includes conditions for practices such as oxidation with hypochlorite (i.e., chlorine bleach) and peracetic acid, as well as inactivation using UV irradiation." This means that it is important to keep up with routine maintenance, especially when it includes disinfection.

## Can COVID-19 spread through swimming pools? Is there anything we need to do to keep pool users and workers safe?

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), "There is no evidence that COVID-19 can be spread to humans through the use of pools and hot tubs. Proper operation, maintenance, and disinfection (e.g., with chlorine and bromine) of pools and hot tubs should remove or inactivate the virus that causes COVID-19."



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