

## **Coronavirus in Drinking Water and Wastewater FAQs Compiled from EPA and CDC March 14, 2020**

Both the EPA and CDC have issued guidance in the form of the following FAQs:

Source: EPA.gov – Last updated March 11, 2020

Link: <https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-drinking-water-and-wastewater>

### **Is drinking tap water safe?**

EPA recommends that Americans continue to use, and drink tap water as usual. The World Health Organization (WHO) has stated that the, “presence of the COVID-19 virus has not been detected in drinking-water supplies and based on current evidence the risk to water supplies is low.” Additionally, according to the CDC, COVID-19 is mainly thought to spread between people who are in close contact with one another. Further, EPA’s drinking water regulations require treatment at public water systems to remove or kill pathogens, including viruses.

### **Do I need to boil my drinking water?**

Boiling your water is not required as a precaution against COVID-19.

### **Is tap water safe to use for hand washing?**

EPA recommends that Americans continue to use, and drink tap water as usual. According to CDC, washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds helps prevent the spread of COVID-19.

### **What should I do if I am concerned about my drinking water?**

WHO has stated that the, “presence of the COVID-19 virus has not been detected in drinking-water supplies and based on current evidence the risk to water supplies is low.”

Homeowners that receive their water from a public water utility may contact their provider to learn more about treatment being used. Treatments could include filtration and disinfectants such as chlorine that remove or kill pathogens before they reach the tap.

Homeowners with private wells who are concerned about pathogens such as viruses in drinking water may consider approaches that remove bacteria, viruses, and other pathogens, including certified home treatment devices.

### **Do I need to buy bottled water or store drinking water?**

EPA recommends that citizens continue to use, and drink tap water as usual. At this time, there are no indications that COVID-19 is in the drinking water supply or will affect the reliable supply of water.

### **What is EPA’s role in ensuring drinking water remains safe?**

EPA has established regulations with treatment requirements for public water systems that prevent waterborne pathogens such as viruses from contaminating drinking water. These treatment requirements include filtration and disinfectants such as chlorine that remove or kill

pathogens before they reach the tap. Additionally, WHO notes that “conventional, centralized water treatment methods which use filtration and disinfection should inactivate COVID-19 virus. EPA will also continue to coordinate with our federal partners, including the CDC, and will continue to provide technical assistance and support to states, as appropriate.

### **Can I get COVID-19 from wastewater or sewage?**

WHO has indicated that “there is no evidence to date that COVID-19 virus has been transmitted via sewerage systems, with or without wastewater treatment.”

### **Do wastewater plants treat COVID-19?**

Yes, wastewater plants treat viruses and other pathogens. COVID-19 is a type of virus that is particularly susceptible to disinfection. Standard treatment and disinfectant processes at wastewater treatment plants are expected to be effective.

### **Will my septic system treat COVID-19?**

While decentralized wastewater treatment (i.e., septic tanks) do not disinfect, EPA expects a properly managed septic tank to treat COVID-19 the same way it safely manages other viruses often found in wastewater. Additionally, when properly installed, a septic system is located at a distance and location designed to avoid impacting a water supply well.

Source: CDC – last updated March 10, 2020

Link: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/water.html>

### **Can the COVID-19 virus spread through drinking water?**

The COVID-19 virus has not been detected in drinking water. Conventional water treatment methods that use filtration and disinfection, such as those in most municipal drinking water systems, should remove or inactivate the virus that causes COVID-19.

### **Is the COVID-19 virus found in feces?**

The virus that causes COVID-19 has been detected in the feces of some patients diagnosed with COVID-19. The amount of virus released from the body (shed) in stool, how long the virus is shed, and whether the virus in stool is infectious are not known.

The risk of transmission of COVID-19 from the feces of an infected person is also unknown. However, the risk is expected to be low based on data from previous outbreaks of coronaviruses, such as acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). There have been no reports of fecal-oral transmission of COVID-19 to date.

### **Can the COVID-19 virus be spread through pools and hot tubs?**

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 or bromine) of pools and hot tubs should remove or inactivate the virus that causes COVID-19.

## **Can the COVID-19 virus spread through sewerage systems?**

CDC is reviewing all data on COVID-19 transmission as information becomes available. At this time, the risk of transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19 through sewerage systems is thought to be low. Although transmission of COVID-19 through sewage may be possible, there is no evidence to date that this has occurred. This guidance will be updated as necessary as new evidence is assessed.

SARS, a similar coronavirus, has been detected in untreated sewage for up to 2 to 14 days. In the 2003 SARS outbreak, there was documented transmission with sewage aerosols. Data suggest that the standard municipal wastewater system chlorination practices may be sufficient to inactivate coronaviruses, so long as utilities monitor free available chlorine during treatment to ensure it has not been depleted.

Wastewater and sewage workers should use standard practices, practice basic hygiene precautions, and wear personal protective equipment (PPE) as prescribed for current work tasks.

## **Should wastewater workers take extra precautions to protect themselves from the COVID-19 virus?**

Wastewater treatment plant operations should ensure workers follow routine practices to prevent exposure to wastewater. These include engineering and administrative controls, safe work practices, and PPE normally required for work tasks when handling untreated wastewater. No additional COVID-19 specific protections are recommended for employees involved in wastewater management operations, including those at wastewater treatment facilities.