

COVID-19 Drinking Water FAQs

March 24, 2020

Can the COVID-19 virus spread through drinking water?

No. According to information found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website, conventional water treatment methods that use filtration and disinfection, such as those in most municipal drinking water systems, should inactivate the virus that causes COVID-19.

Is my municipal drinking water safe?

Yes. Existing treatment requirements, water quality standards, and design standards for construction of drinking water treatment systems and wells address viruses and microbial pathogens, including the COVID-19 virus.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (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 and COVID-19 is not spread through drinking water.

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?

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

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

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

What is the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) 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 enter the drinking water supply.

Do I need to worry about my groundwater if it is not treated?

Groundwater undergoes natural processes, including natural filtration and attenuation, which facilitate the removal of viruses, bacteria, and other microbial contaminants, such as COVID-19. Water from properly constructed, located, and maintained drinking water wells is generally safe. Wells using a shallow water table aquifer, such as dug or bored wells, and wells close to a failed/failing septic tank and/or drainfield are at risk of microbial contamination. If you have questions about your private well, consult a licensed well driller. If you are concerned about the presence of contaminants or pathogens such as viruses in your well water, it is a good idea

to get it tested for total coliform and *E. Coli*. Information about the Virginia Household Water Quality Program is available at: <https://www.wellwater.bse.vt.edu/vahwqp.php>

Is my water routinely sampled and tested for COVID-19, or other viruses?

Sampling for viruses is not necessary since existing disinfection treatment kills pathogens like viruses and bacteria.

EPA has established treatment techniques that inactivates, kill or remove pathogens like viruses and bacteria. The treatment techniques involve routine sampling of directly measurable parameters, including disinfectant residual, temperature, pH, and turbidity. This routine and ongoing sampling demonstrates that the treatment is effective to address pathogens including viruses.

Are there reports of operators at water treatment plants getting COVID-19? If so, is my water safe to drink?

VDH is reaching out to waterworks owners to determine if there are any problems related to COVID-19. We have not received reports of problems related to COVID-19. Waterworks are required to have plans in place to keep their water treatment plants operating, even in a pandemic. These emergency operation plans make sure they have required staff on hand to keep critical services functioning.

Are EPA or VDH waiving any water quality, treatment, sampling or operational requirements for waterworks?

VDH and EPA have not changed any of the water quality, treatment, sampling, or operational requirements in response to COVID-19.

What is VDH doing to help protect my drinking water?

VDH continues to enforce all regulations and treatment requirements for public water systems that prevent waterborne pathogens such as viruses from contaminating drinking water. During a pandemic, waterworks are required to maintain the same water quality standards.

VDH has reached out to waterworks owners and operators to provide information and encourage owners and operators to prepare for potential future events.

In addition, VDH is continually reaching out to waterworks owners and operators to discover if they are being impacted by COVID-19, for example, loss of operational staff, lack of supplies and chemicals, or loss of support services, such a water quality laboratory.

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

Homeowners that receive their water from a public water utility may contact their provider to learn more about treatments employed. Treatments may include filtration and disinfection such as disinfection with chlorine that inactivate pathogens before they reach the tap.

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 with private wells who are concerned about pathogens such as viruses in drinking water should sample their water and get it tested for total coliform and *E. coli* at a certified laboratory. If testing indicates a problem, homeowner should consider approaches that remove bacteria, viruses, and other pathogens, including home treatment devices certified to a NSF standard. More information about water quality can be found at the Home Water Quality page of the Virginia Cooperative Extension web page: <https://ext.vt.edu/foodhealth/home-water-quality.html>

If I wanted more information about my drinking water or have concerns about it, whom should I contact?

Contact your water utility for more information. If you have a private water supply, contact the local health department for more information.

What resources are available to learn more about drinking water and COVID-19? The following resources are available to learn more on COVID 19:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

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

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/water.html>

Virginia Department of Health

<http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/>

American Waterworks Association

<https://www.awwa.org/Resources-Tools/Resource-Topics/Coronavirus>

Association of Drinking Water Administrators

<https://www.asdwa.org/covid19/>

Virginia Department of Health <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/surveillance-and-investigation/novel-coronavirus/>

Water Environment Federation <https://www.wef.org/news-hub/wef-news/the-water-professionals-guide-to-the-2019-novel-coronavirus/>

Centers for Disease Control

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/children-faq.html>

World Health Organization

<https://www.who.int/publications-detail/water-sanitation-hygiene-and-waste-management-for-covid-19>

NSF International

<https://www.nsf.org/consumer-resources/water-quality/water-filters-testing-treatment/home-watertreatment-system-selection>