

Hygiene, water and sanitation for coronavirus (COVID-19)

Last updated: 28 March 2020

Hygiene, safe water and sanitation are essential to protect human health from infectious diseases, including from coronavirus (COVID-19). Practise good hygiene always and continue to use and drink water from your tap as usual to keep healthy.

Key messages

- Hand hygiene is one of the most important prevention measures for coronavirus (COVID-19)
- Drinking water supplied by water utilities is safe to drink and for normal household uses
- Continue to maintain your private drinking water supply if you have them (rainwater tanks, bore water)
- Manage wastewater and recycled water as per current requirements and good hygiene practices
- Practise good hygiene when using public drinking water fountains and bubblers

Hand hygiene is one of the most important prevention messages

Practising good hand hygiene and sneeze/cough hygiene is the best defence against most viruses – especially coronavirus (COVID-19).

To reduce your exposure and chances of getting ill or transmitting coronavirus (COVID-19) to others:

- cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Dispose of the tissue. If you don't have a tissue cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow
- wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after:
 - you have been in a public place;
 - blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing;
 - going to the bathroom or using the toilet;
 - and before food preparation and eating. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitiser that contains at least 60 per cent alcohol
- if unwell, avoid contact with others
- avoid shaking hands
- maintain physical distancing (keep your distance from others by over 1.5 m).

For more information on good personal hygiene refer to <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus> and https://www.who.int/gpsc/clean_hands_protection/en/.

Drinking water supplied to your tap by water utilities is safe to drink

In Victoria, reticulated drinking water supplies are highly regulated and well treated, and water utilities are well placed to continue providing safe, good quality drinking water to Victorians.

There is no evidence that drinking water will be affected by coronavirus (COVID-19) or transmitted by drinking water. The current evidence is that the coronavirus (COVID-19) is transmitted from person-to-person via the respiratory system through sneezing, coughing and secretions.

The safety of drinking water supplied to Victorians by water utilities (also known as water agencies) is regulated by the Department of Health and Human Services under a comprehensive regulatory framework. This framework ensures a consistent, reliable supply of safe, good quality drinking water. Existing drinking water treatment and disinfection processes, including the use of chlorine, designed to make your water safe are effective in removing microorganisms that may be present in source waters treated for drinking.

Water provided through a water utility is the best and safest option. Water supply is an essential service and water utilities will continue to deliver safe tap water directly to your home every day. **There is no need to buy bottled water.**

It is essential that you keep yourself healthy by drinking tap water to stay hydrated and maintain good hygiene such as regularly washing your hands.

Continue to maintain your private drinking water supply (rainwater tanks, bore water)

If you rely on a private drinking water supply continue to maintain it by using the department's existing guidance available at <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/HealthyLiving/Water-quality-in-tanks-bores-and-dams>.

There is no evidence that drinking water will be affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) virus and there is no evidence that the virus can be transmitted by drinking water.

Manage wastewater and recycled water as per current requirements and good hygiene practices

In Victoria, wastewater and recycled water are managed and treated properly and carefully by water utilities to protect public health and the environment.

Recycled water undergoes treatment to ensure that the recycled water quality is suitable for the intended end use. The standard controls currently in place still apply; additional restrictions on end uses or exposures are not necessary.

Water utilities have existing treatment controls including disinfection to destroy more common pathogens in wastewater which are effective for the coronavirus (COVID-19). Based on the structure of the coronavirus (COVID-19), it is expected to be more sensitive to chlorine than other viruses in wastewater. The existing, standard approaches, already used for working safely with wastewater, still apply to water utilities, and no special or specific changes need to be made due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) virus. These standard approaches include 'business as usual' hygiene practices such as PPE (safety goggles, face shields or masks, gloves) and handwashing to minimise the risk of exposure to pathogens in wastewater.

In all cases of wastewater spills or overflows from sewers or septic tanks, you should seek the assistance of your water utility or a licenced plumber. Sewage contains many hazards and existing infection control precautions must be maintained. Additional precautions for coronavirus (COVID-19) are not necessary based on current evidence. To minimise the chance of blockages and sewage overflows, it is important that people only flush toilet paper.

Practise good hygiene when using public drinking water fountains and bubblers

Public drinking water supplies are safe to drink, however the surfaces around the fountain including the spout and button/lever could pose a transmission risk for coronavirus (COVID-19). When using public drinking water fountains and bubblers it is good practice to run them to draw fresh, drinking water through prior to drinking and most importantly **avoid placing your mouth directly on the fountain or bubbler**. When filling up your water bottle at the drink fountain, ensure the spout of your drink bottle does not contact the fountain head or bubbler.

If the fountain requires you to push a button or lever, clean the surface first or use your elbow or a clean tissue to operate the tap. Wash your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub if you've touched a button or lever with your hands.

Where these controls are difficult to implement at schools or early childhood centres, parents are encouraged to provide their children with personal drink water bottles and have them labelled and named. These drink water bottles must not be shared.

Additional information

Follow the instructions and recommendations by the Department of Health and Human Services website on coronavirus (COVID-19) to get the most up to date information. <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>.

The World Health Organization (WHO), Water, sanitation, hygiene and waste management for coronavirus (COVID-19), Technical Brief World Health Organization is available here <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/water-sanitation-hygiene-and-waste-management-for-covid-19>

Australian Government Department of Health – Novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV): Information for employers. <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-resources>

Water Research Australia SARS-CoV-2 Water and Sanitation Factsheet
<https://www.waterra.com.au/publications/factsheets/>

Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.
© State of Victoria, Australia, Department of Health and Human Services, March 2020.