



Drinking water Consumers and COVID-19: What you need to know upon returning to service

June 5, 2020

The extensive COVID-19 “stay-at-home” orders declared by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, have resulted in many commercial buildings (schools, offices, hotels, etc.) with reduced or no water use.

Stagnant water in these buildings can cause conditions that increase the risk for growth and spread of Legionella or bacteria and lead to low or undetectable levels of disinfectants such as chlorine. Stagnant water can also create unsafe levels of lead in many older buildings.

Because of these conditions there are special considerations Public Drinking Water System consumers need to account for when returning to service after an extended period of discontinued service (weeks or months).

If your facility has been closed for weeks

Flush the Water Pipes



A thorough flushing process is imperative after an extended period of discontinued service.

The New Mexico Environment Department recommends:

Prior to reopening a building that has been closed or had limited occupancy as a result of COVID19, building owners should confirm that their water meter is working properly, all piping is intact, and the building’s plumbing is thoroughly flushed.

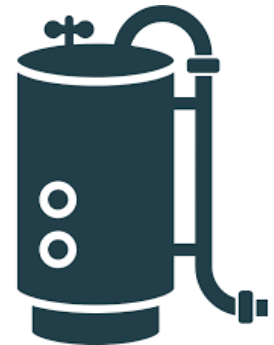
Flushing processes will vary depending on the structure; key elements of flushing protocols should include:

- 1) Remove or bypass devices such as point-of-use treatment units prior to flushing. Remove aerators from faucets if possible.
- 2) Take steps to prevent backflow or the siphoning of contaminants into plumbing (e.g., close valves separating irrigation systems from the plumbing, disconnect hoses attached to faucets, etc.) Flushing may need to occur in segments (e.g., floors, individual rooms) due to facility size and water pressure.
- 3) Flush the cold-water lines first for 10 to 30 minutes, starting from the closest tap to where the water enters the building, then open all remaining cold-water taps including hose bibs, faucets, water fountains, showerheads, toilets, etc. Care should be taken to minimize splashing and aerosol generation during flushing.

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- 4) Drain and clean hot water tanks. Ensure your water heater is properly maintained and the temperature is set at or above 140°F. Ensure that all maintenance activities are carried out according to the manufacturer's instructions or by professionals. Higher temperatures can further reduce the risk of Legionella growth; ensure that you take measures to prevent scalding.

- a) Flush the hot water lines starting from the closest tap to the water heater and the open all remaining hot water taps. Run the water lines for 10 to 30 minutes at each outlet. Run the hot water until it reaches maximum temperature and begins to empty the tank.
- b) After the lines have been flushed, clean and flush all appliances that use water, including humidifiers, ice machines (dump at least two batches of ice), and dishwashers.



- 5) Replace the aerators and all point-of-use treatment units. Replace filters, including those used in refrigerators, water fountains etc.
- 6) These same principles can also be followed by building owners that have recently reopened or begun the process of reopening their buildings or businesses.

Additional Information:

All Together New Mexico COVID-Safe Practices for Individuals and Employers

As New Mexico gradually returns to the new normal of living in a COVID-positive world, every one of us must accept the responsibility to protect ourselves, our families, our neighbors and especially the most vulnerable in our communities. In some ways, this will be even harder than sheltering in place. To get New Mexico moving again, and keep it moving, we must do our part. The [New Mexico COVID-Safe Practices for Individuals and Employers](#) will help to keep New Mexicans healthy.

CDC Guidance

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued [guidance](#) to ensure the safety of building water systems and end-use devices after a prolonged shutdown. Additional information for building owner/operators is in existing CDC resources, such as the [Toolkit: Developing a Water Management Program to Reduce Legionella Growth and Spread in Buildings](#).

EPA Recommendation

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [recommends](#) that building owners and managers take proactive steps to protect public health by minimizing water stagnation during closures and taking action to address building water quality prior to reopening.

Public water systems should be prepared for questions from building owners/operators managing hotels, schools, childcare facilities, office buildings and public buildings. Properties that are managed as large campuses (business parks, colleges, etc.) should also consider these guidance documents.

If you have any comments, questions, or concerns, please contact us at: drinking.water@state.nm.us