



# New Mexico Environment Department

SCIENCE | INNOVATION | COLLABORATION | COMPLIANCE

## Drinking water utilities and COVID-19: What you need to know

March 19, 2020

In light of the March 11 public health emergency declared by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, the New Mexico Environment Department is issuing the recommendations below to Public Drinking Water Systems and Utility Operators.

Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19, including a fever, cough, runny nose and difficulty breathing, should call **(855) 600-3453** for direction from the New Mexico Department of Health.

### The New Mexico Environment Department recommends:

1. Public water systems should continue to monitor water quality, collect routine compliance samples, and provide sample results to the New Mexico Environment Department Drinking Water Bureau (NMED DWB) as normal. In addition, the NMED DWB will continue collecting drinking water chemical compliance samples while taking extra precautions to stem the spread of COVID-19. Ongoing monitoring to ensure a safe supply of drinking water is critical for ensuring public health.
2. Discuss the importance of careful hygiene practices and social distancing with all water system staff and contractors. Health officials recommend frequent hand-washing for at least 20 seconds and six feet of distance between people. Rely on various communication tools, such as email and phone, to avoid gathering employees in groups.
3. Review and make any necessary updates to your water system emergency response plans. Ensure that emergency contact phone numbers for your water systems are updated and accurate. Update contact information for chemical suppliers, equipment suppliers, or contracted services, such as well drillers or electricians. Identify key customers such as hospitals or other critical care facilities that may have special needs, including increased demand.
4. Identify essential staff, such as certified operators, emergency coordinators, or other staff, that are required to maintain continuous operation of your water system. Plan ahead by designating emergency backups for essential employees in the case they become sick or otherwise unable to perform their job functions. Coordinate with neighboring water systems to share resources or essential personnel in the event of an emergency.
5. Conduct an inventory of essential chemicals for your water system's treatment process or other essential equipment. Ensure that you have a sufficient supply of these chemicals or equipment. Place additional orders for essential chemicals if needed and have backup equipment on hand that is ready for use.
6. Review and make any necessary updates to your water system's operation and maintenance plan and sampling plan. Update written instructions for critical operations or equipment, if needed. Ensure that all relevant staff are familiar with these critical operations instructions.
7. Contact the NMED DWB if you have questions or concerns about your drinking water system. The DWB has staff available to discuss compliance issues or provide technical assistance and many other resources that you or your water system may need.
8. Contact the New Mexico Rural Water Association (NMRWA) and explore the benefits of the New Mexico Water and Wastewater Agency Response Network (NMWARN). NMWARN is a voluntary agreement between systems to help each other out in emergency situations. The main concept of the NMWARN is "utilities helping utilities." NMWARN could be a critical resource in the event of a significant emergency at your water system. For more information visit <https://nmrwa.org/nmwarn/> or contact NMRWA at (505) 884-1031 or (800) 819-9893.

#### Contact NMED DWB:

[https://www.env.nm.gov/drinking\\_water/](https://www.env.nm.gov/drinking_water/) and [drinking.water@state.nm.us](mailto:drinking.water@state.nm.us)

#### Additional resources:

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

[Centers for Disease Control & Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/disease-prevention/)

New Mexico Department of Health  
<http://cv.nmhealth.org/>