

Hygiene, water and sanitation

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 tap water as a source of safe drinking water.

Key messages

- > Hand hygiene is one of the most important prevention measures for COVID-19.
- > Drinking water supplied by SA Water is safe to use for normal household purposes including drinking.
- > Continue to safely manage your private drinking water supply if you have them (rainwater tanks, bore water).
- > Wastewater and recycled water should be managed per current requirements.
- > Continue to maintain and operate on-site wastewater systems.
- > 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 COVID-19.

To reduce your exposure and chances of getting ill or transmitting 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.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/healthy+living/protecting+your+health/preventing+disease+and+infection/hand+hygiene> and https://www.who.int/gpsc/clean_hands_protection/en/.

Drinking water supplied to your tap is safe to drink

There is no evidence that drinking water will be affected by coronavirus (COVID-19) or transmitted by drinking water. It is important that you keep yourself healthy by drinking tap water to stay hydrated and maintain good hygiene such as regularly washing your hands.

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South Australian public supplies provide safe good quality drinking water. Existing drinking water treatment and disinfection processes, including chlorination are designed to remove or inactivate harmful microorganisms. These processes will be effective against COVID-19. There is no need to buy bottled water.

The safety of drinking water supplied to South Australians is regulated by the Department for Health and Wellbeing.

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

If you rely on a separate domestic drinking water supply such as a rainwater tank or private bore continue to manage them safely by following SA Health's existing guidance at:

<https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/protecting+public+health/water+quality>

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 COVID-19. When using drinking water fountains and bubblers it is good practice to run them to draw fresh water through prior to drinking and most importantly **avoid placing your mouth directly on the fountain or bubbler**. When filling up a water bottle at a drinking fountain, ensure the spout of the bottle does not contact the fountain head or bubbler.

If operating a fountain requires a button to be pushed or a lever to be used, clean the surface of the device first or use your elbow or a clean tissue to operate the button or lever. 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.

Wastewater and recycled water

There is currently no evidence that the COVID-19 virus is transmitted by wastewater and recycled water.

Municipal sewerage services, Community Wastewater Management Systems and recycled water supplies are carefully managed by SA Water and Local Government to protect public health and the environment.

No increased measures are required to deal with COVID-19 in wastewater. Based on the structure of the coronavirus COVID-19 it is not expected to survive as long as other viruses in wastewater and is expected to be more sensitive to treatment including chlorination. Recycled water can continue to be used with no additional restrictions on end uses.

It is advised that unnecessary contact with wastewater and recycled water should be avoided due to the general hazardous nature of wastewater; however additional precautions for COVID-19 are not necessary.

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Wastewater industry and operators

Existing, recommended protective measures used for working safely with wastewater are effective in providing protection against harmful micro-organisms including viruses. These recommended measures include hygiene practices such as frequent handwashing and wearing appropriate PPE such as (safety goggles, face shields or masks, gloves). No additional measures are required due to the potential presence of the COVID-19.

On-site wastewater systems

With people spending more time at home, systems may be receiving a greater wastewater load than usual. It is important to continue to maintain and operate your on-site wastewater system as per the current requirements. This includes regular servicing of aerated wastewater treatment systems to ensure effective operation and use.

Avoiding blockages and sewerage overflows

To minimise the chance of blockages and sewer overflows, it is important to only flush toilet paper. Toilet paper alternatives do not break down quickly and may cause blockages in pipes and adversely affect on-site wastewater systems. If you have to use an alternative to toilet paper it should be placed in the bin and not flushed.

Overflows or spills from sewerage infrastructure should be reported to the relevant authority (generally SA Water or your Local Council in the case of Community Wastewater Management Systems).

Additional information

Visit SA Health's website for instructions and recommendations on COVID-19 and for up to date information <http://sahealth.sa.gov.au/covid-19>

The World Health Organization (WHO), Water, sanitation, hygiene and waste management for 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/>

For more information

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