



Tap Water Safety When Reopening Buildings After COVID-19 Shutdowns

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Tap water safety can be a concern when buildings reopen after COVID-19 closures.

Many public buildings, including most schools, have had low or no water use during pandemic closures. Owners or operators of any building that has been shut for some time should be concerned about re-commissioning their plumbing when reopening. This is necessary to reduce the risk of heavy metals in water, such as lead and copper, and of opportunistic pathogens, such as *Legionella* bacteria that can cause illness.

What you need to do.

Simple but specialized flushing procedures are recommended to remove any stagnant water or biofilm buildup in your plumbing system.

- Startup the plumbing system two to three weeks before reopening
- Thoroughly flush the entire water system including fixtures such as showers, dishwashers, ice makers
 - Larger buildings may need ongoing flushing over several months
 - See [Building Water Quality and Coronavirus: Flushing Guidance for Periods of Low or No Use](#)¹

More resources for tap water safety:

Purdue University [Center for Plumbing Safety](#)

- Webinar: [Building Water System Safety in the Era of COVID-19](#)²
- Downloadable [Flushing Plans](#)³

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

- [Ensuring Drinking Water Quality in Schools During and After Extended Closures](#)⁴
- [Maintaining or Restoring Water Quality in Buildings with Low or No Use](#)⁵
- Checklist for [Restoring Water Quality in Buildings for Reopening](#)⁶

Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

- [Guidance for Reopening Buildings After Prolonged Shutdown or Reduced Operation](#)⁷
- “Water Systems” section in [Essential Elements of Safe K–12 School Operations for In-Person Learning](#)⁸

Washington State Department of Health

- [School Water Plumbing Re-opening Following Extended Closures Guidance](#)⁹

National Drinking Water Alliance

- [Factsheets](#) on school and childcare tap water safety with a focus on lead; with links to additional resources for drinking water safety, access and promotion¹⁰

Resources for school drinking water access during COVID-19 and beyond:

USDA

- [Q&A for the Child Nutrition Programs during School Year 2020-21](#),¹¹ Questions 13-16

Alliance for a Healthier Generation and the National Drinking Water Alliance

- [Increasing Drinking Water Availability in Schools During COVID-19 and Beyond](#)¹²

National Drinking Water Alliance

- [Healthy Hydration: Ensuring access to safe water in schools](#)¹³



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Resource links

- ¹ Environmental Science, Policy & Research Institute (ESPRI) and AH Environmental Consultants, Inc. 2020. *Coronavirus Building Flushing Guidance*. Available at, https://esprininstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/FINAL_Coronavirus-Building-Flushing-Guidance-20200403-rev-1.pdf
- ² Purdue University Center for Plumbing Safety. 2020. Building Water System Safety in the Era of COVID-19. Webinar available at, <https://engineering.purdue.edu/PlumbingSafety/resources/PHCPPros-Webinar-May-2020.pdf>
- ³ Purdue University Center for Plumbing Safety. 2020. *Flushing Plans*. Available at <https://engineering.purdue.edu/PlumbingSafety/resources/flushing-plans>
- ⁴ US Environmental Protection Agency. 2020. *Ensuring Drinking Water Quality in Schools During and After Extended Closures*. Available at, <https://www.coronavirus.kdheks.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1808/Ensuring-Drinking-Water-Quality-in-Schools-During-and-After-Extended-Closures>
- ⁵ US Environmental Protection Agency. 2020. *Maintaining Building Water Quality*. Available at, https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-05/documents/final_maintaining_building_water_quality_5.6.20-v2.pdf
- ⁶ US Environmental Protection Agency. 2020. *Checklist for Maintaining Building Water Quality*. Available at, https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-05/documents/final_checklist_for_maintaining_building_water_quality_5-6-2020.pdf
- ⁷ Centers for Disease Control. 2019. *Guidance for Reopening Buildings After Prolonged Shutdown or Reduced Operation*. Available at, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/building-water-system.html>
- ⁸ Centers for Disease Control. Updated 4/23/2021. *Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention; Essential Elements of Safe K-12 School Operations for In-Person Learning*. Available at, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunity%2Fschools-childcare%2Fschools.html
- ⁹ Washington State Department of Health. 2020. *School Water Plumbing Re-opening Following Extended Closures Guidance*. Available at, <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Pubs/331-667.pdf>
- ¹⁰ National Drinking Water Alliance. 2017. Drinking Water Factsheets for School and Childcare. Available at, <https://www.drinkingwateralliance.org/facts>
- ¹¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Q & A for the Child Nutrition Programs during School Year 2020-2021*. Available at, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic/covid-19/questions-and-answers-child-nutrition-programs-during-sy-2020-21>
- ¹² Alliance for a Healthier Generation and Nutrition Policy Institute. 2020. *Increasing Drinking Water Availability in Schools During COVID-19 and Beyond*. Available at, <https://api.healthiergeneration.org/resource/851>
- ¹³ Nutrition Policy Institute and National Drinking Water Alliance. 2020. *Healthy Hydration: Ensuring access to safe drinking water in schools*. https://9c073bb6-f7ef-48b6-ad05-b37094ec4e4f.usrfiles.com/ugd/9c073b_1e37b4417e7641abb4da3473e0b0154d.pdf