

FACT SHEET: COVID-19

(official name: severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2)

Can I catch COVID-19 from drinking water?

There is no evidence that the COVID-19 virus is transmitted by drinking water. The current evidence is that the COVID-19 virus is most likely transmitted from person-to-person by sneezing and coughing.

Drinking water in Australia is high quality and is well treated. There is no evidence that drinking water will be affected by coronavirus.

Should I buy bottled water?

There is no need to buy bottled water for drinking. Safe, clean tap water will continue to be supplied directly to your home every day.

How are water utilities protecting the water supply?

Water utilities have stringent hygiene measures in place at water treatment plants. In addition, there is almost no human contact in the process of treating water for drinking.

Existing water treatment and disinfection processes, including use of chlorine, are effective in removing viruses from water supplies.

Water utilities are in contact with key government agencies to monitor and understand the health impact of COVID-19 as it develops and are well-connected internationally to stay updated on the latest information and evidence.

What if workers are quarantined at home, will water still be supplied?

Water is an essential service and water utilities are well prepared to manage their response to COVID-19. Water utilities have existing emergency response plans and are continuing to update them in response to the most current available information.

In general water treatment plants are secure, have back up power and require few staff to operate them and some water treatment plants can be operated remotely. Water utilities ensure that multiple staff are able to operate water treatment plants and water supply systems so that if one person is on leave for any reason drinking water can still be safely and reliably supplied.

Can COVID-19 be transmitted by the wastewater system?

There is no evidence that the COVID-19 virus has been transmitted via wastewater systems, with or without wastewater treatment. Current disinfection methods are expected to be sufficient to manage the COVID-19 virus.

Wastewater continues to be managed and treated properly and carefully by water utilities to protect public health and the environment.

Best practices for protecting the occupational health of workers at wastewater treatment plants continue to be maintained.

In general wastewater treatment plants are secure, have back up power and require few staff to operate them and some wastewater treatment plants can be operated remotely. Water utilities ensure that multiple staff are able to operate wastewater treatment plants and sewerage systems so that if one person is on leave for any reason wastewater can still be safely and reliably treated.

How to help prevent the spread of coronavirus?

The Australian Department of Health advises that practising good hand hygiene and sneeze/cough hygiene is the best defence against most viruses. Good practice is:

- wash your hands frequently with soap and water, before and after eating, and after going to the toilet
- cover coughs and sneezes, dispose of tissues, and use alcohol-based hand sanitiser
- and if unwell, avoid contact with others.

Drinking water quality in Australia

Urban water utilities supply safe, high quality drinking water to cities and regions across Australia. The Australian Drinking Water Guidelines developed by the National Health and Medical Research Council provide approximately 100 rigorous guideline values for water utilities to follow. In the most recent National Performance Report for the Australian water industry, which assesses compliance against the Guidelines, or licence conditions imposed on utilities, compliance with water supply quality remained high.

This fact sheet has been reviewed by experts and is based on advice from the World Health Organization and US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

About WSAA

The Water Services Association of Australia (WSAA) is the peak industry body representing the urban water industry. Our members provide water and sewerage services to over 22 million customers in Australia and New Zealand and many of Australia's largest industrial and commercial enterprises.

Media inquiries:

Sandi Kolbe, Communications Manager

Water Services Association of Australia

Phone: 0427 224 694

Email: sandi.kolbe@wsaa.asn.au