



Department of Environmental Protection

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Always use fresh drinking water

During the COVID-19 pandemic some buildings and facilities have little or no water running through the pipes and fixtures for an extended period of time. These stagnant water conditions can result in discolored water, lower chlorine levels, higher concentrations of lead and copper and even the proliferation of legionella, under certain building conditions. Fresh water should be drawn into the building water systems and stagnant water flushed out before the buildings are reopened.

EPA and MassDEP recommend 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.

Use the following steps to get fresh water into your building:

- **Review and understand the plumbing configuration and water usage in your building.**
- **Inspect the plumbing** to ensure it is functioning properly and is in good condition.
- **Contact your water utility** if you have questions on water use and quality in your area. For a list of Massachusetts public water suppliers see <https://www.mass.gov/media/831461/download>.
- **Maintain any water treatment systems used in the building**, such as any point-of-entry or point-of-use filters or water softeners.
- **Maintain the hot water system**, including keeping the temperature at or above 120°F per CDC guidance to prevent *Legionella* growth. See CDC's guidance for reopening buildings for additional information, referenced in the Resources section below.
- **Flush the building's plumbing system regularly.** See instructions for flushing in the Resource section below.
- **Maintain all non-drinking water building water systems and devices according to the manufacturer's specifications**, such as: sprinkler systems, eye-wash stations, and safety showers, Decorative fountains/water features, spas, hot tubs, pools, and cooling towers. etc.
- **Buildings with specific at-risk populations - like schools and childcare programs** - should flush prior to opening the building. Stagnant water can contain elevated levels of lead and copper. See weblinks for detailed information in the Resource section below.
- **Consider developing a water management program** for your building water systems and all devices that use water. See CDC instructions for developing a water management program in the Resource section below.

This information is available in alternate format. Contact Michelle Waters-Ekanem, Director of Diversity/Civil Rights at 617-292-5751.

TTY# MassRelay Service 1-800-439-2370

MassDEP Website: www.mass.gov/dep

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- Workers involved with flushing should be properly equipped with personal protective equipment (PPEs) to prevent exposure to splash/aerosols and follow all workplace safety measures. See Massachusetts Reopening: Sector Specific Protocols and Best Practices at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/reopening-mandatory-safety-standards-for-workplaces>.

Resources: General Building Re-opening

- MassDEP: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/massdep-building-flushing-information/download>
- USEPA: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-05/documents/final_maintaining_building_water_quality_5.6.20-v2.pdf
- CDC Guidance for Reopening Buildings After Prolonged Shutdown or Reduced Operation <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/building-water-system.html>

Resources: Schools/Childcare Facilities

- MassDEP
 - Reducing Lead and Copper in School and Child Care Facility Drinking Water Before Re-Opening: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massdep-covid-19-resources-for-water-suppliers-and-wastewater-operators#water-supplier-resources>
 - MassDEP Fact Sheet – Flushing: A Short-Term Solution to Reduce Lead and Copper <https://www.mass.gov/media/1584926/download>.
- USEPA
 - Ensuring Drinking Water Quality in Schools During and After Extended Closures: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2021-03/documents/us_epa_schools_extended_closures_factsheet_508_3-4-2021_0.pdf
 - Ensuring Drinking Water Quality in Child Care Facilities During and After Extended Closures: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2021-03/documents/us_epa_cc_facilities_extended_closures_factsheet_508_3-4-2021.pdf