

COVID-19

Safe Water During Re-Opening of Buildings

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the prolonged closure or reduced occupancy of many buildings, including offices, retail outlets, restaurants, hotels, campgrounds and more. When buildings are closed or on low occupancy for any prolonged period, water in the building becomes stagnant and can pose serious health risks. Harmful microbiological and chemical contaminants can grow or leach into water supply. As the Ontario Government begins to lift restrictions, and communities prepare to re-open public spaces, we need all building owners and operators to be aware of issues that could threaten the safety of the water and sewer services in their building(s).

While municipal water utilities are responsible to get clean, safe drinking water to each property, it is the responsibility of each property owner to ensure it maintains the safety of that water within their building.

In general, when a building is not in use and the building's water system is not actively maintained, the water becomes stagnant within the pipes, equipment, and any storage tanks. The disinfectant residual decays and disappears, hot water systems can become cooler and cold water systems can become warm. To prevent this, there are a few steps that you can do:

Before you start - Map or sketch your entire water system:

- Identify zones and include all treatment equipment, pumps, valves, tanks, etc.
- List all outlets/fixtures such as taps, fountains, showers, etc.
- Be sure to include any connected food units like ice or coffee makers.

Flush your plumbing:

- Start where the water enters the building and work from closest outlet to furthest outlet.
- Flushing requirements vary but run the water until the water maintains a constant cold temperature.
- This should be a rigorous flush so you want to open taps fully (remove the aerator filter or shower head) but be aware this could cause greater spray and aerosols.

Flush Cold Water First:

- Flush your cold water system first, then your hot water system.
- Hot water tanks should be kept above 60°C to ensure a temperature over 50°C throughout the system. Be sure to flush the tank fully to replace all of its water. You may consider draining the tank, but be cautious as this could stir up sedimentation or cause syphoning concerns.
- Then flush the hot water system from closest to furthest from the tank

Cleaning

- If possible, clean, disinfect and rinse all outlets, screens etc.

Regular flushing at all outlets replaces stagnant water within the system with fresher, treated water to minimize the risk of microbial growth in plumbing.

If you have any questions, please contact:

Lambton Public Health
Public Health Inspector - 519-383-8331

Resources/ Links:

Canadian Water and Wastewater
Association: Safely Re-Opening Buildings
General Guidance for Water Utilities
https://cwwa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Re-Opening-Buildings-PARTONE_FINAL.pdf