Ensuring Water Quality for Business Reopenings

Recommendations for restaurants, businesses and other facilities restarting water use after shutdowns

EBMUD ensures high-water quality for all customers with constant testing and proper treatment. The water we deliver is disinfected, but it's not sterile. As the coronavirus shelter-in-place restrictions phase out or change, and businesses reopen, managers of large buildings and campuses should take precautions to ensure water is safe and tastes good.

Water is perishable just like any food or drink

During the health crisis shutdown, many businesses closed or limited operations. That resulted in water becoming stagnant in pipes and plumbing systems. When water sits in pipes, water heaters, and storage tanks, the chlorine gradually dissipates. Without that chlorine residual in the building's water systems, microorganisms can grow, causing water quality problems. Some pathogenic microorganisms, notably Legionella, can proliferate inside of a building's water system and cause serious disease.

Water quality can be improved with proper cleaning and flushing of the entire plumbing system when a building or facility is returned to service after any prolonged closure.

In addition, the protective film on the inside of the pipes can erode, leading to dissolution of metal pipes.

Fortunately, water quality can be improved with proper cleaning and flushing of the entire plumbing system when a building or facility is returned to service after any prolonged closure.

Flush your water system before you open

This is especially important for schools, gyms, hotels, factories, and other facilities that have complicated onsite water systems. Standard maintenance includes checking temperature settings for hot water heaters, and [*continued*]

Key steps of flushing protocols

Note that flushing instructions vary depending on the structure.

1. Remove or bypass devices like point-of-entry treatment units (large devices that treat all water as it enters a building) prior to flushing.
2. Take steps to prevent backflow or the siphoning of contaminants back into plumbing (close valves separating irrigation systems from home plumbing, disconnect hoses attached to faucets, etc.).
3. Organize flushing to maximize the flow of water (open all outlets simultaneously to flush the service line and then flush outlets individually starting near where the water enters the structure).
4. Run enough water through all outlets (hose bibs, faucets, showerheads, toilets, etc.), removing aerators when possible. This should be done for 10 to 30 minutes for each outlet (duration varies based on outlet velocity).
5. Flush the cold water lines first, and then the hot water lines. The hot water tank can be drained directly. It may take 45 minutes to fully flush a typical 40-gallon hot water tank.
6. Replace all point-of-use devices (small filters that treat the water from just one faucet or refrigerator).
7. Additional precautions may be warranted if there is excessive disruption of pipe scale or if there are concerns about biofilm development. If the plumbing system is not ready for use, you may temporarily use bottled water, install a point-of-use device, or hire a plumber/contractor to thoroughly clean the plumbing system.

These recommendations for residences and small buildings are based on American Water Works Association guidelines:

https://www.awwa.org/Resources-Tools/Resource-Topics/Coronavirus#lt-10681543-shutoffs-and-return-to-service-guidance

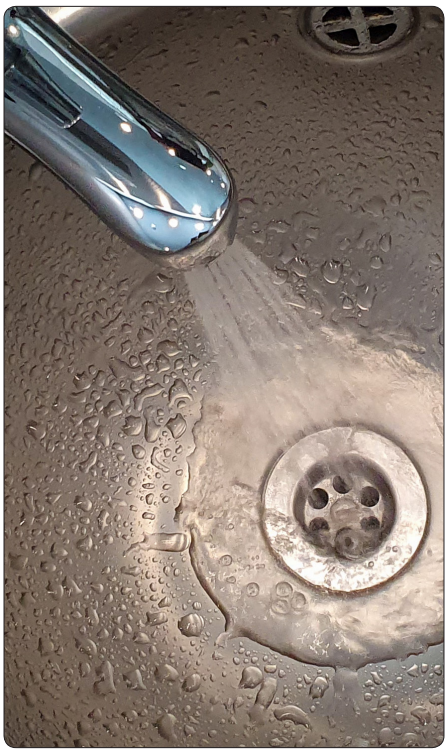
Please see the guidance available from the Centers for Disease Control:

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/building-water-system.html

ensuring that tanks, cooling towers, hot tubs, ice machines, soda fountains, dishwashers, and other plumbing components are safe for use.

Flushing clears out low-quality water that accumulated during periods of no or minimal water use, and replaces it with high-quality water from EBMUD's distribution system. In particular, shower heads, faucets, and other fixtures should be thoroughly cleaned.

All large buildings should have a comprehensive water management program that is tailored to the individual on-site water system.



If you have questions about your water quality, please call 510-287-1842 or email customerservice@ebmud.com.

EBMUD has a proud history of providing high-quality drinking water for 1.4 million customers in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. The District's award-winning wastewater treatment protects San Francisco Bay and serves 685,000 customers.

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