

# Fact Sheet



**Metropolitan Water  
Reclamation District  
of Greater Chicago**



March 24, 2020

## COVID-19 and the Chicago Region's Water Infrastructure

The Chicago Department of Water Management (DWM) treats and distributes drinking water, and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) manages stormwater and treats wastewater for much of the Chicago regional area. **Both agencies are continuing operations during the COVID-19 pandemic and all of our facilities are operating normally.**

**Our region's drinking water is safe.** Drinking water is subjected to a thorough treatment process which includes disinfection. This treatment process is highly effective at killing microbes including COVID-19. Treated water is continually sampled and tested to confirm that it meets strict federal, state, and local standards, and there is currently no evidence that COVID-19 is transmitted through drinking water or by contact with sewage. However, by taking precautions to avoid contact with untreated water and sewage, you can reduce your overall risk of illness.

**Only flush toilet paper. Don't flush anything else.** Alternatives can potentially clog your home's plumbing or the municipal sewer in your neighborhood and contribute to basement backups.

**Take steps to prevent basement backups.** While sewage can contain pathogens that cause illness, it is unknown if COVID-19 can be transmitted by contact with sewage. You can reduce your overall risk of illness and potential demand on health care resources during this time by taking steps to prevent basement backups. For more tips on preventing basement backups visit [mwrdd.org](http://mwrdd.org).

**If you have a basement backup, avoid direct contact with the water and use disinfectants such as bleach to clean up.** See <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/bleach.html> for more on cleaning with bleach.

**Avoid contact with waterways and consider rescheduling water recreation.** It is unknown if COVID-19 can be transmitted through contact with waterways, but it is well established that other pathogens that can cause illness can be present in rivers, lakes and streams. You can effectively reduce your overall risk of illness and potential demand on health care resources during this time by rescheduling your water recreation for after the pandemic. Do clean with soap and water if you touch river water.

**Metropolitan Water Reclamation  
District of Greater Chicago**

[public.affairs@mwrdd.org](mailto:public.affairs@mwrdd.org) [mwrdd.org](http://mwrdd.org)  
312.751.6626 312.316.8436

**Chicago Department of Water Management**

[watermanagement@cityofchicago.org](mailto:watermanagement@cityofchicago.org)  
[www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/water](http://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/water)  
312.744.6635