March 28, 2020

Messaging to Water System Operators:

- **Is drinking water at risk?**
  - Permitted water systems operating in compliance with the Drinking Water Protection regulations can continue to use their tap water for drinking and washing as usual. The World Health Organization (WHO) has stated that the “presence of the COVID-19 virus has not been detected in drinking water supplies and based on current evidence the risk to water supplies is low. Additionally, according to the USCDC, COVID-19 is mainly thought to spread between people who are in close contact with one another.

- **How can drinking water supply system operators practice social distancing and minimize risks at work?**
  - General precautions for employers with respect to social distancing, hygiene and employee illness apply. For the most up-to-date information see:
    - [http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/employers-businesses](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/employers-businesses)
    - [http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/common-questions#3495](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/common-questions#3495)
  - Proper handwashing is essential. It is safe to wash hands under a Boil Water Advisory or Do Not Consume Advisory. For systems under a Do Not Use advisory, use bottled water with soap or hand sanitizer for hand hygiene.

- **How can workers protect themselves during water sampling and respond to people who don’t want to let them into their homes?**
  - Sampling locations should be reviewed with a view for social distancing (see links above). This may restrict access to some sites, and new sites may wish to be chosen as an interim measure to avoid unnecessary contact. Respect any access restrictions for public buildings.

- **Could there be other impacts on water sampling systems?**
  - Laboratory testing of drinking water quality under the Drinking Water Protection Act is part of critical infrastructure and therefore considered an essential service. Regular microbiological testing of drinking water for ongoing safety assurance should continue.
  - Remote areas may experience a reduced availability of transport couriers, which could affect the ability to get samples to BCCDC for testing. Contingency plans are in the works and additional information will be forthcoming.

- **How can we manage water systems’ human resources if water systems are experiencing sickness and/or self-isolation of staff?**
  - Emergency response plans (ERPs) should be updated and staffing coverage procedures should be reviewed to plan for staff absences due to illness or isolation, as it is important that those experiencing flu-like symptoms do not come to the workplace. Water suppliers may consider looking to neighbouring suppliers or to see where reciprocal agreements may be put in place.
  - For large water systems, which require Environmental Operators Certification Program (EOCP) certified operators, the EOCP’s ‘Operator Peer Network’ program and Operators Without Borders may provide a source of appropriate available operators who may be able to attend or provide remote advice to enable work to be done. For further info, contact Kalpna Solanki at ksolanki@eocp.ca or 604.874.4784 x221.
- Small water systems, which do not require EOCP certification unless specified in conditions on their permit, may seek to train others in the basic operations of system to provide assistance in case of operator unavailability.
- Identify priority actions to be taken in the event of a reduced workforce and create operations teams that provide a critical mixture of skills required to operate the water system 24x7 if necessary.
- Ensure written standard operating procedures are clear in case junior staff need to carry out duties not normally assigned to them.
- If staff resources are a potential issue, it may be prudent to consider postponing new non-critical projects to ensure tasks essential to delivering potable water can be carried out.

**What else should treatment plant operators do to prepare?**
- Ensure they are well stocked with extra parts, equipment, PPE, chemicals and other resources in case of supply chain or worker shortages. Consider contacting neighbouring systems to be prepared for supply shortages.
- Ensure they have a plan in case potable water cannot be supplied. This may include alternative water supplies, bulk water delivery, supplying bottled water or issuing public water notices (“boil water advisories”) to your water users.
- Ensure they have a communication plan to contact all affected water customers/users.
- Postpone any non-emergency works that require the temporary shutdown of the water supply to any portion of the service delivery area. Handwashing and sanitation are critical to help control the spread of this current outbreak.

**When should water suppliers contact Drinking Water Officers (DWO)?**
- In any event where emergency response plans (ERP) are activated, ensure contact with the district DWO. If updates to ERPs are made, please provide the revised copy to your district DWO.
- If the required sampling frequency cannot be maintained, please review ERPs and consult with district DWO.
- If there is a stoppage of water delivery for any reason.
- If there are any other questions.

**What messaging can we give our water users?**
- **Is drinking tap water safe?**
  - WHO has stated that the, “presence of the COVID-19 virus has not been detected in drinking-water supplies and based on current evidence the risk to water supplies is low.” Water users can continue to use their water as they have been previously directed by the water supplier.
- **Do I need to boil my drinking water?**
  - Providing your water system is not already on a Boil Water Notice, boiling your water is not required as a precaution against COVID-19.
- **Is tap water safe to use for hand washing?**
  - Treated tap water is safe to use as usual. Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds helps prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- **Do I need to buy bottled water or store drinking water?**
  - There are no indications that COVID-19 is in the drinking water supply or will affect the normal supply of water. Other than your regular stock of emergency water, there is no need to purchase or use bottled water to reduce your risk of exposure to COVID-19 unless directed by your water supplier.