

# COVID-19 Information on Customer Assistance Programs for Water System Customers

Governor's proclamation [20-23.6](#), Ratepayer Assistance and Preservation of Essential Services, requires all energy, telecommunication, and water utilities to develop a COVID-19 Customer Assistance Program to ensure customers impacted financially by the COVID-19 pandemic maintain essential services after the utility shut-off prohibition expires on August 1, 2020.

Our goal is to support community water systems in supporting their customers to ensure all people have access to safe and reliable drinking water. These frequently asked questions will help customers understand their water systems general responsibility to provide this essential service.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Can my water be shut off and what should I do if it is?

Proclamation 20-23.6 gives direction for utilities to develop Customer Support Programs to serve those affected by the COVID 19 Pandemic. The guidance to this proclamation states that in order to assist vulnerable individuals and households while maintaining access to essential services utilities should, at a minimum, prohibit disconnection for low-income and vulnerable households. The main intent of the proclamation and guidance is to support water systems in providing alternate options to customers to avoid water shut-offs. However, there is nothing explicitly prohibiting water shut-offs after the termination of the COVID-19 State of Emergency declaration.

If your water is turned off, first and **foremost call or check your water system's website** to see what options they have created under this proclamation. This proclamation directly applies to water systems with more than 1,000 connections but smaller water systems are strongly encouraged to follow the same guidance. If you have no luck after calling your water system and trying to negotiate a payment plan or other assistance please email [DrinkingWaterCustomerAssistance@doh.wa.gov](mailto:DrinkingWaterCustomerAssistance@doh.wa.gov).

### What is the water system required to do?

The Governor's Proclamation states that all utilities must develop a COVID-19 Customer Support Program consistent with the guidance. This means that any water system serving over 1,000 connections must provide a pathway to maintain this essential service. The pathway chosen, however, is up to the water system. They could include bill forgiveness, payment plans, or other customer assistance options.

## What are the requirements to be eligible for my water system's customer assistance program?

Every water system will create their own eligibility requirements to ensure that customers affected by the COVID-19 get the needed support with their bills. Check with your water system about their specific eligibility requirements.

## How do I contact my water system?

The easiest way to find the contact information for your water system is to look at your water bill. Your water bill should have the name of the water utility, their phone number, and may list a website.

If you are having trouble locating the contact information for your water system please email at [DrinkingWaterCustomerAssistance@doh.wa.gov](mailto:DrinkingWaterCustomerAssistance@doh.wa.gov).

## Does this erase my obligation to pay my bill?

Maintaining a financially resilient water system is imperative to the ongoing health and safety of its customers. This proclamation doesn't relieve your responsibility to pay your bill. It does require water systems to work with you towards maintaining the essential service of water access. This could be through bill forgiveness, a payment plan, or some other form of assistance.

## What if my water account is delinquent from before the governor order of March 18, 2020?

While the proclamation and guidance don't specifically address what should happen in this circumstance, it does state that customers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic should maintain access to essential services. The spirit of this proclamation is to maintain water access in the home. In that spirit we encourage all water systems to work with any delinquent customers, whether that delinquency was from before or during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## What if my water system is refusing to make a long-term payment plan?

Utilities should offer payment plans six to eighteen months, or longer considering each customer's unique circumstances. If your water system is not offering a customer assistance option that works with your unique circumstances, please email [DrinkingWaterCustomerAssistance@doh.wa.gov](mailto:DrinkingWaterCustomerAssistance@doh.wa.gov).

## What if I'm a renter and have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic but my landlord is responsible for water payments?

Customer Assistance Programs often times require recipients of the program to be the owner-occupier of a residence, which can prevent landlords from receiving benefits and passing them along to the renter. Renters and other multi-family units are considered to be hard-to-reach customers. While neither the proclamation nor the guidance specifically address this circumstance, the spirit of the proclamation is to keep these essential services. If your water is shut-off due to your landlord not paying the water bill, please contact the Tenants Union of

Washington at (206) 723-0500 or visit their website at [tenantsunion.org](http://tenantsunion.org). You can also contact your water system to see how they can support you.

### What if I get late fees?

The proclamation prohibited charging late fees until August 1, 2020. You should not be charged late fees for any bills past due between April 17 and August 1<sup>st</sup> in accordance with the governor's proclamation. The guidance on customer assistance programs states that utilities, at a minimum, should consider prohibiting disconnections for low-income and vulnerable households and waiving fees associated with late payments for those impacted by COVID-19.

### Who do these customer assistance programs apply to?

While this proclamation applies to anyone experiencing economic hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic, each water system will have their own eligibility criteria. Check with your water system to verify your eligibility status.

## More COVID-19 Information and Resources

Stay up-to-date on the [current COVID-19 situation in Washington](#), [Governor Inslee's proclamations](#), [symptoms](#), [how it spreads](#), and [how and when people should get tested](#). See our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.

A person's race/ethnicity or nationality does not, itself, put them at greater risk of COVID-19. However, data are revealing that communities of color are being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19- this is due to the effects of racism, and in particular, structural racism, that leaves some groups with fewer opportunities to protect themselves and their communities. [Stigma will not help to fight the illness](#). Share accurate information with others to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- [WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [WA State Coronavirus Response \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Find Your Local Health Department or District](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Stigma Reduction Resources](#)

**Have more questions about COVID-19?** Call our hotline: **1-800-525-0127**, Monday – Friday, 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., Weekends: 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact a health care provider.

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 ([Washington Relay](#)) or email [civil.rights@doh.wa.gov](mailto:civil.rights@doh.wa.gov).