



SCOTT A. THOMPSON
Executive Director

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

KEVIN STITT
Governor

March 18, 2020

Dear Water System Official,

As you are aware, Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt issued an emergency declaration for all 77 counties due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is critical at this time that Oklahomans have access to a safe quality and adequate quantity of potable water for drinking, cooking and cleaning.

As a drinking water system official, you play a critical role in protecting public health. The continued practice of maintaining disinfection and operating water treatment plants and systems correctly is necessary for ensuring adequate protection from microbial contaminants. DEQ and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have treatment requirements for public water supply systems that prevent waterborne pathogens, such as viruses, from contaminating drinking water. These treatment requirements, including routine disinfection processes, are expected to be effective against the coronavirus.

As a reminder, DEQ's drinking water regulations require free chlorine residuals of at least 1 mg/L (ppm) at points of entry and 0.2 ppm throughout distribution systems, and total chlorine residuals of at least 2.0 ppm at the points of entry and 1.0 ppm throughout distribution systems. Your water system may have increased requirements under the Groundwater or Surface Water Treatment Rules. As a general guideline, if you are uncertain about the effectiveness of your water system's disinfection process, you may want to increase your disinfection dosage to achieve a free chlorine residual of at least 0.5 ppm throughout the distribution system, as this will provide an added level of protection.

DEQ encourages your drinking water system to train additional personnel on the basic functions of the water system and develop relationships with neighboring systems to ensure continuity of operations. Your water system may want to sign up for SoonerWARN, an electronic system to request assistance or sign up on the list of operators that could aid other PWS systems, at www.soonerwarn.org for cooperative sharing of resources in times of emergency. If you have difficulties accessing SoonerWarn, contact the Oklahoma Rural Water Association (ORWA) at 1-405-672-8925.

Effective March 18, 2020, the following changes are in effect:

1. **Routine bacteriological samples (total coliform samples)** for the Revised Total Coliform Rule (RTCR) must be collected.
 - a. While your water system must still collect the required number of bacteriological samples, you may modify your sampling plan by only using existing and accessible sample sites that do not endanger your water system personnel or people at the sample location during the pandemic. You may use sample sites more than once.



- b. If you will not get good coverage of your distribution system using only existing sample sites, please select a replacement site at an address close to an existing sample site to collect your sample. You should still use the same sample site code (ex: TC004), but please include a comment on the Chain of Custody indicating the actual address where the sample was collected. Your laboratory will report this comment to DEQ along with your sample results.
2. **Your regular laboratory may not be analyzing water samples during this emergency.** Please call ahead to verify your laboratory will be receiving samples before submitting them.
 - a. If your regular laboratory is not receiving samples, the DEQ State Environmental Laboratory may be able to assist you. You can reach the State Environmental Lab at 1-405-702-1000.
 - b. Please keep in mind that a laboratory may be able to analyze some analytes, but not others, depending on personnel and resources. Again, please call ahead to verify before submitting samples.
3. **If you anticipate difficulty in completing sampling requirements during this emergency situation,** please contact your DEQ PWS District Coordinator for guidance at drinkingwater@deq.ok.gov or 1-405-702-8100.

Important note: Drinking water emergencies must still be reported to DEQ immediately. Please report all emergencies to DEQ's 24-hour Emergency Response Hotline at 1-800-522-0206, including:

- i. E. coli positive water sample
- ii. Turbidity higher than 1 NTU
- iii. Loss of water pressure
- iv. Issuing or suspending a precautionary boil advisory
- v. Introduction of a toxic chemical or other dangerous contaminant to the water supply (pesticides, etc.)
- vi. Any other drinking water emergency that you would normally report immediately to DEQ

DEQ is coordinating with our state and federal partners, including the EPA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). We will provide updated information as it becomes available.

For more information on COVID-19 from the EPA, please visit:

<https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-drinking-water-and-wastewater>

For more information on COVID-19 from the CDC, please visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/water.html>


DEQ will continue to provide technical assistance as appropriate during this emergency. Your DEQ Water Quality Division PWS District Coordinator and PWS District Engineer can both be reached at 1-405-702-8100 or at drinkingwater@deq.ok.gov.

You can also contact your local environmental specialist in the DEQ Environmental Complaints and Local Services Division (ECLS). Contact information for your local ECLS office can be found at <https://www.deq.ok.gov/deq-local-offices/> or by calling 1-405-702-6100.

The ORWA can also provide technical assistance if you have operational issues at the water treatment plant, unexplained low water pressure, or low chlorine residuals. You can reach ORWA at 1-405-672-8925.

DEQ is prepared to assist Oklahoma PWS systems during this difficult time. Because we care about your and your family's health, DEQ encourages your water system to work with us remotely via email and phone during this emergency. However, in cases where immediate onsite assistance from DEQ is needed, our staff will make every reasonable effort to assist in a manner that is safe for both DEQ and PWS system staff. Thank you for partnering with DEQ to protect public health and provide high-quality drinking water during this time.

Sincerely,


Shellie R. Chard, Director
Water Quality Division