

Advice on managing impacts of COVID-19 for local water utilities in regional NSW

The spread of COVID-19 in NSW communities could seriously disrupt water utility operations and the delivery of water and sewerage services. Utilities should prepare for the impact of having staff and external support unavailable due to illness or mandatory isolation. Utilities should also prepare for potential supply chain interruptions. Early planning will be key to maintaining these essential public services.

Review your operations for business continuity risks

- Review standard operating procedures for key tasks, including treatment operations, reticulation repairs and maintenance, water sampling and testing.
- Consider the impact of staff being unavailable, including minimum staff requirements.
- Review external contractors critical to operations (eg electricians, fitters, plumbers, couriers).
- Take an inventory of critical spares, plant and equipment, testing equipment, and water treatment chemicals. Restock as necessary and consider where stock could be sourced if normal supplies were disrupted. NSW Health has been advised by IXOM that the supply chain for gas chlorine is robust and no disruption is expected due to COVID-19.
- Review contact lists for critical customers, particularly health and aged care facilities.
- Train other council staff in support roles including operational monitoring and water sampling.

Plan for increased external support and regional collaboration

- Start conversations with neighbouring utilities about business continuity planning.
- Review arrangements for cross LGA boundary bulk water supply. Ensure contact lists are up to date and include multiple contacts for escalation.
- Agree on arrangements with neighbouring utilities for resource sharing. Share information and gain an understanding of neighbouring systems.
- Share inventories of equipment and chemicals with neighbours.

Enable easy access to and sharing of key information

- Upload critical water supply documents to a cloud storage platform such as One Drive, Dropbox or Google Drive. Include documents such as system diagrams, reticulation diagrams, drinking water management system documents, standard operating procedures, operation and maintenance (O&M) manuals etc.
- Share the link with key staff, and prepare for wider sharing as appropriate. Secure internet access to these documents will allow staff from neighbouring utilities and other agencies to view these documents (with your permission) in preparation for supporting operations.

Communicate any risks both internally and externally

- Ensure General Manager and Local Emergency Management Officer are aware of any changes to normal operations to allow for reporting and escalation as appropriate.
- Contact local Public Health Unit and DPIE Regional Officers with any changes to normal operations or concerns about managing risks.

Continue to closely monitor and respond to critical control points

- Ensure critical control points continue to be regularly monitored.
- Ensure all staff responsible for monitoring critical control points are trained in response procedures.
- Immediately notify your Public Health Unit with any critical limit exceptions or any difficulty maintaining regular monitoring.