



Dear Public Water Supply Operators:

We are reaching out to you today to update you on what to expect related to our regulatory interactions and communication as we collectively navigate through this difficult time. In response to the evolving COVID-19 public health situation, DEQ has decided to increase remote working and social distancing. We are taking this action in an effort to protect the health and well-being of our employees and communities.

Though we have made modifications to our business practices, DEQ remains operational and ready to assist you. We are committed to continuing to meet our regulatory obligations, including working with you to help maintain compliance, as well as continuing to protect public health and the environment.

We are working to make resources available on the DEQ website regarding any changes to our programs or services. Information will be updated regularly and is available at [deq.mt.gov/updates](https://deq.mt.gov/updates).

***The following updates are specific to public water supplies.***

#### Coliform sampling

During this time of concern, DEQ will allow modification of the sample site plan to avoid sampling in homes when possible. Systems may use alternative sampling locations from low traffic sites, outside spigots, commercial areas or sampling stations as long as sampling is representative of the distribution system. If a sample site is modified from that listed in the sample plan, it should be noted on the sample bottle. For samples collected from outside spigots, extra caution should be taken to protect the quality of the sample. Because outside spigots are at greater risk for accidental contamination, if a sample collected from an outside spigot is positive for coliform bacteria, a subsequent sample must be collected from inside the building.

To provide an "increased level of protection," a system that maintains a minimum chlorine residual, at all points in its distribution system, of anything greater than 0.5 mg/L of **FREE** chlorine may change its sample sites to entry point or source samples. Systems that chlorinate at levels less than the 0.5 mg/L of **FREE** chlorine can increase their levels to take advantage of this option.

#### Exams canceled

In an effort to protect the health and well-being of our employees and communities during the COVID-19 response, DEQ's office locations are closed to public access until further notice and most employees are teleworking. Water and wastewater operator exams will not be administered until our offices re-open. Please contact us if this poses a problem for your system.

#### Continuing education credits deadline extended

Due to Covid-19, the Montana Rural Water Systems conference was canceled and other trainings may also be canceled. DEQ has extended the deadline for continuing education credits (CECs) until Aug. 31, 2020. DEQ also plans to make some CECs available online, free of charge. We will inform you when this option is available.

Public water supplies fill an essential need. It is critical for systems to continue to monitor as usual and to supply clean water. DEQ will do everything that we can to help operators meet this goal. During this time, ongoing communication is essential. Our staff are available to support you through normal methods of communication, including phone and email. While we are committed to continuing to provide services, our shift to increased remote working may result in slightly longer response times than usual. We will let you know of any additional significant changes to level of service and will share updates via the website above. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with us if you have any questions.



Thank you for your patience as we adjust to this transition.

Take care,

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