

## MP Briefing: Water industry response to COVID-19

### Overview

Across the industry water companies are working together so that every single person across the UK can continue to rely on their water supply and sewerage service. We are working closely with regulators, the UK Government and devolved administrations to ensure we continue to work to the most up-to-date information and guidance.

Below we have provided key messages which address questions you may have in relation to water during the COVID-19 outbreak. If you would like to discuss any of these issues in greater detail please contact **Peter Jenkins, Water UK's Public Affairs Manager.**

### Key messages

All water companies have measures in place for people who struggle to pay their water and wastewater services. During the current crisis water companies are:

- Using the full range of their schemes to help customers who are struggling to pay their bills in these difficult circumstances.
- Encouraging customers who are struggling financially to go to their local water company's website to find out about the help available to them.
- Actively offering payment breaks or payment holidays for anyone in financial difficulties as a result of COVID-19.
- Adjusting payment plans urgently to help with sudden changes in household finances.
- Simplifying the processes for customers to get extra assistance, making it as easy as possible for customers to get the help they need.
- Helping customers get advice on benefits and managing debts, particularly for customers who have not been in financial difficulties before.
- Stopping new court applications on unpaid bills during the current restrictions and stopping any enforcement visits.

- To help the public keep themselves, their families and their communities protected from the spread of COVID-19, water companies have also closed their leisure facilities. These include normally busy places such as sailing centres, bird-watching hides, wildlife havens and water parks, along with the car parks, cafes and toilets linked to them.
- Out on the streets fixing leaks and dealing with sewer blockages doing essential work to keep the system working well for everyone.

### Advice to customers and constituents

Below we have set out in more detail the measures that have been put in place to help customers and constituents who are affected by COVID-19.

### Water bills

- We know this is a difficult time for all customers and the last thing people want to be worrying about is how they are going to pay their bills.
- Water companies are here to help. Anyone concerned about their bill should, in the first instance, contact their water company. If they are unsure who their water company is they can use the Water UK 'find your supplier' tool [here](#).
- All water companies provide a range of support to customers. These include schemes such as payment holidays and payment matching.
- Companies will continue to help customers pay their bills through WaterSure, Social Tariffs and other affordability schemes, and are actively reaching out to customers to encourage them – as well as their friends and families – to take advantage of the help available on bills. This is especially important if someone's financial circumstances have suddenly changed due to the coronavirus outbreak.
- To help the public keep themselves, their families and their communities protected from the spread of COVID-19 water companies and their partners will stop all collections visits. Instead, they will use other channels to contact customers.
- In addition, water companies will not commence any new court applications during the current restrictions and will also stop any enforcement visits.

### Contacting water companies

- Water company phone lines could get busy with longer than usual waiting times.
- Where possible customers should try online options – through their company's website, email or social media. Many of these channels will be able to help with queries, leaving phone lines free for urgent enquiries.
- Customers should also look out for any communication from their water company.

### Your water supply

- The whole water industry is working hard to ensure customers continue to enjoy the same world class water and sewerage service they expect.
- Tap water remains perfectly safe to drink and there is no risk of contracting the virus through it.

### Home visits

- Water company staff are continuing to work on their networks but are limiting direct contact with customers unless it's an emergency.
- They will be taking the necessary precautions for those people who are self-isolating if they do need to visit them. The water industry's priority is to keep customers and colleagues safe.

### What customers can do

- While we appreciate that some people have been struggling to find toilet paper due to panic-buying we are asking customers not to flush kitchen roll or wet wipes down the toilet.
- Nothing should be flushed down the toilet apart from the 3 Ps – pee, poo and toilet paper – and only wipes which have the official 'Fine to Flush' symbol. This is because the blockages caused by wipes and products like kitchen roll which are not designed to be flushed can lead to sewer flooding – with raw sewage flooding people's kitchens and bathrooms.

### Further information

~~We will continue to provide you with updates during this time. If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact Peter Jenkins, Water UK's Public Affairs Manager, at [pjenkins@water.org.uk](mailto:pjenkins@water.org.uk).~~

### About Water UK

Water UK is the trade body for water and wastewater service suppliers for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Water UK is made up of 25 members, and four associate members, from across the sector. Water UK works to engage with companies and regulators to ensure customers receive high quality tap water at a reasonable price and that our environment is protected and improved.