



WATER & CORONAVIRUS: INFORMATION AND FAQ

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BACKGROUND ON CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

- Coronavirus is currently spreading through the world; it is highly contagious and has a high mortality rate.
- The spread of the virus needs to be slowed down substantially ("flattening the curve") or public health facilities will be overrun, leading to higher rates of infection and a higher number of deaths due to the virus, as we have seen in Italy and other parts of the world.
- To reduce the spread of infection, public health officials and governments are imploring people to stay home as much as possible, practice social distancing, disinfect surfaces, wear a mask outside of the home, and wash their hands frequently with soap – the latter being the most important recommendation commonly stated.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

"For the most privileged, washing hands with soap and clean water - the main defense against the virus - is a simple gesture. But for some groups around the world, it is a luxury they cannot afford!"

— UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

- Globally, more than 2.2 billion people lack access to safe water services.
- In Mexico, more than 50% of the population experiences some form of water scarcity. Roughly 32 million people in the country, or 25% of the total population, only receive water 1-2 times per week or less, and more than 9 million people have no water access at all and must bring water in from outside sources.
- The state of Guanajuato has one of the highest indices of water vulnerability in the world. Guanajuato is classified as having "extreme water stress" with more than 70% of its aquifers over-exploited – leading to declining water tables throughout the state.
- The Alto Río Laja Aquifer in northern Guanajuato is the main source of water in the region supplying water to more than 680,000 residents across seven municipalities, including San Miguel de Allende, Dolores Hidalgo, San Felipe, San Diego de la Unión, San Luis de la Paz, Doctor Mora, and San José Iturbide.
- This finite water supply is overexploited by at least 30% and in a constant state of decline.
- As a result, it is no longer possible to replenish our aquifer, which is now depleting at an alarming rate of 2-3 meters yearly.
- Due to this situation, both surface water and groundwater supplies are drying up, wells need to be drilled deeper and deeper, and the water that remains is often contaminated with arsenic and fluoride.
- Arsenic and fluoride are associated with a whole slew of serious health conditions like dental and skeletal fluorosis, developmental disorders in children, and several types of cancer.
- However, even more concerning right now, is the lack of water.
- There are more than 2,500 rural communities throughout this region. Many of these communities receive water only for a few hours once or twice per week, once a month, or not at all. This requires many communities to truck water in from outside sources, and, in general, store their water in containers.
- This makes running water sparse, and in some cases, impossible for many in our region, and for too many, it means there is no consistent water access to meet the hygiene requirements necessary to control the spread of this virus.
- This is further complicated in these rural areas by slow moving, and often inaccurate, information and a lack of nearby medical facilities equipped to respond to this virus.
- In general, good information is largely unavailable regarding how rural communities suffering from insufficient water supplies or contaminated water can practice proper personal hygiene to prevent the spread of Coronavirus.

WHAT IS CAMINOS DE AGUA DOING?

- Our work right now is expanding and changing by necessity and is more important than ever.
- We are continuing to find ways to work with those most vulnerable in our region, safely under current conditions, to increase water access.
- We are rapidly building a new community education program that will make local communities, especially in rural areas, more aware of the personal hygiene practices they need to adopt immediately and how they can do so with limited water supplies.
- We are curating information and developing our own video workshops and other materials to help prevent the spread of Coronavirus in these vulnerable communities.
- We are utilizing virtual networks and social media, used widely in many rural communities in this region, to rush this information out quickly.
- We are also working with partners to provide useful information to all of our audiences virtually through social media, live streams, and other media.

HOW DO I HELP STOP THE SPREAD OF THE VIRUS?

- Wash your hands frequently for 20-30 seconds at a time – thoroughly soaping your hands.
- Use proper sneezing and coughing etiquette: Cover your mouth and nose with a flexed elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing, dispose of used tissue immediately, and wash your hands
- Avoid touching your face (mouth, nose, eyes)
- Practice social distancing maintaining 2 meters distance from others. Do NOT engage in shaking hands, hugging or kissing people, sharing food, utensils, cups and towels
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has cold or flu-like symptoms
- Seek medical care early if you or your child has a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing
- Clean surfaces that might have come in touch with the virus, and generally clean surfaces more frequently (especially in public spaces)
- Wear a facemask

WHEN SHOULD I WASH MY HANDS?

In the context of COVID-19 prevention, you should make sure to wash your hands at the following times:

- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After visiting a public space, including public transportation, markets, and places of worship
- After touching surfaces outside of the home, including money
- Before, during, and after caring for a sick person
- Before and after eating
- Before putting on and after removing a facemask

In general, you should always wash your hands at the following times:

- After using the toilet
- Before and after eating
- After handling garbage
- After touching animals and pets
- After changing babies' diapers or helping children use the toilet
- When your hands are visibly dirty

WHAT IF MY WATER IS CONTAMINATED WITH ARSENIC AND FLUORIDE?

- You can absolutely wash your hands and surfaces with arsenic and fluoride-contaminated water. **There is no health risk washing your hands with water contaminated with arsenic and fluoride.**
- However, you should avoid drinking or cooking with this water. When consumed over long periods of time, arsenic and fluoride can lead to severe health impacts.
- Fluoride is strongly linked to dental fluorosis – the browning of teeth, which is becoming increasingly common in our region, crippling skeletal fluorosis – the deformation of bones, and cognitive development issues in children.
- Continuous exposure to arsenic is associated with hypertension, skin disease, propensity for diabetes, chronic kidney disease, cognitive development and learning disabilities in children, and several types of cancer.
- However, again, you can absolutely wash your hands and surfaces with this water.

WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH WATER TO WASH MY HANDS FREQUENTLY?

- For washing hands frequently, we recommend [building a "Tippy Tap" hand-wash station](#).^{*} These systems can be built quickly with materials easily found close to the home. They create a stream of running water to properly wash hands, and they use very little water and do not require electricity nor a traditional water network. This is a great solution for washing hands with limited water resources. The important thing is to soap your hands thoroughly before rinsing.
- Buy or [make hand sanitizer](#).^{*} Hand sanitizer should be 60% alcohol or more.
- Simply use alcohol.
- [Capture rainwater with materials you have in the house](#)^{*} to expand your water access.
- Washing hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer, when practiced/used correctly, are both highly effective at killing the coronavirus.
- PLEASE NOTE: Alcohol and alcohol-based hand sanitizer kills the coronavirus, but it does not kill all kinds of bacteria and viruses. For example, it is relatively ineffective against the norovirus and rotavirus.

^{*} Virtual workshops are currently only available in Spanish. Thank you for your patience as we continue to update our materials.

WHEN SHOULD I USE A FACEMASK?

- Wear a mask if you are taking care of someone who is sick, or suspected of being sick, with COVID-19
- Wear a mask outside of the home
- Wear a mask if you are coughing or sneezing
- Everyone should wear a mask inside the home if someone is suspected of being sick with COVID-19

HOW SHOULD I USE A FACEMASK?

- We recommend making your own facemask. Surgical grade masks, like N95 masks, are in short supply and badly needed by healthcare professionals trying to combat the spread of the virus.
- A mask can be made out of most any material like an old scarf, bandana, or t-shirt. Some materials like quilters' cotton (a tightly-woven, high-thread-count fabric) are more effective than others.
- Before putting on a mask, clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water
- Cover mouth AND nose with mask and make sure there are no gaps between your face and the mask
- Avoid touching the mask while using it; if you do, clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water
- To remove the mask: remove it from behind (do not touch the front of mask). For a single-use mask, discard immediately in a closed bin. For homemade masks, clean the mask every day with alcohol or soap and water.
- Clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water after removing your mask

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