

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



**Washington County, North Carolina
Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response
Public Utilities Press Release #1
April 2nd, 2020 @ 12PM**

**Special Notice Regarding Temporary Suspension of Terminating Public Utilities for Nonpayment
During the Novel Coronavirus (COVID19)**

Dear Utility Customers,

By now you should all be well aware of the serious healthcare and public safety concerns posed by the Pandemic spread of Novel Coronavirus (COVID19).

You should also be well aware of and complying with the terms of the Stay at Home Order signed and issued by North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper as Executive Order No. 121.

The terms of that and other North Carolina Executive Orders can be found online at:

<https://governor.nc.gov/news/executive-orders>

**You can also Text COVIDNC to 898-211 for announcements and updates
Or Dial 2-1-1 or 888-892-1162 Available 24 hours a day 7 days a week for more info**

Washington County has and will continue issuing COVID19 Press Releases available online at:

<https://www.washconc.org/default.aspx> as well as our official County Facebook Page at:
<https://www.facebook.com/Washconc/> which also serves as our primary social media and
online public communications platform. Please be aware having your own Facebook
account is not required to access information on our Facebook page.

Check these sites frequently to stay updated on the latest local COVID19 information and developments.

On March 25th, 2020 Washington County issued a COVID19 General Press Release #3 that included information about our decision at that time to restrict public access to most of our facilities, to encourage online or mailed in payments of utility bills, and to temporarily suspend water system cut-offs through the end of April.

On March 31st, 2020 Governor Cooper signed Executive Order No. 124 which supersedes our prior announcement and which further directs most Utility Service Providers (including Washington County) to temporarily suspend terminating services for residential customers due to nonpayment in most circumstances. It also directs that we suspend the billing and collection of most fees, charges, penalties, or interest for late payment of utility bills that becomes due from the date of that executive order. The full text of the order can be found at the first link above.

What this means for Washington County's Utility Service Customers:

1. Residential water service cut-offs, and the routine billing and collection of applicable late fees, interest, or other charges related to nonpayment of water bills which become due on or after March 31st, 2020 are temporarily suspended pursuant to Executive Order No. 124.
2. This suspension is expected to last for an initial Sixty (60) day period, but may be modified, amended, or extended in the future by the Governor or other applicable laws.
3. This suspension is temporary and **IS NOT A PERMANENT WAIVER, RELEASE, GIFT, or FORGIVENESS** of any customer's ongoing responsibility to pay for any and all water consumed at applicable rates established by the Washington County Utility System. Regardless of the suspension, customers are still liable and responsible for the eventual payment of any and all utility charges lawfully assessed and billed.
 - a. Therefore, customers are strongly encouraged to make every effort to continue paying their applicable utility bills, including water bills, in full each month, in order to avoid any applicable fees, interest, sudden shut-offs, or undue hardships that may otherwise result in the future from deferred payments and overdue balances.
 - b. Similarly, please make every effort to assist the County and yourself from incurring an unexpectedly high water bill or future water bill balance by conserving the use of water and identifying and fixing any and all leaks as quickly as possible during this period.
4. Payment: Until further notice, and particularly during the ongoing effective period of the Governor's Stay at Home Order, due to the need to observe social distancing guidelines and protect the health and safety of our staff and other personnel within the courthouse, we will regrettably no longer be able to permit customers to access the courthouse to pay bills in person at the payment window. Customers should:
 - i. Pay online by credit card at: <http://www.ccpaymentsservice.com/>
 - ii. By mail using a check or money order clearly referencing your account/invoice number
 - iii. If necessary, by drop box in the Washington County Courthouse parking lot using an envelope clearly referencing your account/invoice number with your payment.
 1. If customers are uncomfortable placing cash in the drop box, they should obtain a check or money order to use in making their payments.
 2. Envelopes & payment forms will be provided at the front door of the courthouse.
5. Repayment Plans Pending: Information will be forthcoming about potential payment plan options that we expect to provide for customers who cannot afford to keep their ongoing water bill paid in full.
6. Communications: Please be aware there has been an increased demand in services by phone across the county. If you encounter a busy signal it means we are on the phone serving another customer and we appreciate your patience and understanding. Please continue to call back until you are assisted by our staff.

We apologize in advance for any inconvenience our changes in collection or public access practices may temporarily cause during these challenging circumstances.

We look forward to continuing to serve you and to answering any questions or concerns you may have at 252-793-4285 or mdixon@washconc.org.

Additional Information/Guidance:

COVID-19 Exposure and Symptoms

Know the Symptoms

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness with [symptoms](#) similar to the flu. Symptoms are typically mild to moderate, but there have been cases of severe illness and death due to the virus. The following symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure.

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

Limit Exposure: Coronaviruses like COVID-19 are most often [spread](#) through the air by coughing or sneezing, through close personal contact (including touching and shaking hands) or through touching your nose, mouth or eyes before washing your hands. NCDHHS recommends that persons experiencing fever and cough should stay at home and not go out until their symptoms have completely resolved.

The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has [actions you can take](#) to prevent others from getting sick. This includes:

- Avoiding contact with others.
- Covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Not traveling or going to school or work while sick.
- Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

Call your healthcare provider for medical advice if you have COVID-19 symptoms, such as cough, fever or difficulty breathing.

Before you go to the doctor's office, emergency room or urgent care, **call ahead** and tell them about your symptoms and if you've been exposed to COVID-19. Be sure to follow instructions from your [local health department](#) and health care provider on the appropriate precaution measures to help protect your community. This will allow them to take steps to keep other people from getting exposed.

DHHS has [guidance](#) for patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases who are being cared for at home and those who residing in a [congregate living facility](#), such as a dorm or barracks.

Steps to Take if You Are Sick

The CDC recommends the following steps if you are sick:

- Stay home except to get medical care.
- Separate yourself from other people in your home.
- Call ahead before visiting your doctor.
- Wear a facemask.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes.
- Clean your hands often.
- Avoid sharing personal household items.
- Clean all "high-touch" surfaces every day.
- Monitor your symptoms.

Visit the CDC website for more [details](#). View NCDHHS' [guidance](#) on what to do if you feel sick.

(See the 1 page flier from the NC DHHS referred to as "guidance" above which can also be found online at: <https://files.nc.gov/ncdhhs/documents/files/covid-19/C19-PatientGuidance-3.23.20-FINAL--003-.pdf>)

Know the Difference: Self-monitor, Quarantine and Isolation

These are protective measures used to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among people who may have been exposed.

- **Self-monitoring** is for those that may have been exposed to a person with COVID-19. They should monitor themselves for symptoms (fever, cough, and shortness of breath). Self-monitoring means people should monitor themselves for fever by taking their temperatures twice a day and remain alert for cough or difficulty breathing. If they develop symptoms during the self-monitoring period, they should self-isolate, limit contact with others, and seek medical advice by telephone.
- **Quarantine** is for people who were exposed to a person with a confirmed case of COVID-19 but are not experiencing symptoms. Contact your [local health department](#) or medical provider if you are unsure if you should self-quarantine.
- **Isolation** separates people who are sick from those who are well. People who have tested positive for COVID-19 in North Carolina are in isolation.

Testing

The CDC and NCDHHS have shifted their focus away from mass testing. As such, current testing guidelines are as follows:

- Most people do not need a test. When you leave your home to get tested, you could expose yourself to COVID-19 if you do not already have it. If you do have COVID-19, you can give it to someone else, including people who are high risk.
- Your doctor can help you decide if you need a test. There is no treatment for COVID-19. For people with mild symptoms who don't need medical care, getting a test will not change what you or your doctor do.
- Testing is most important for people who are seriously ill, in the hospital, people in high-risk settings like nursing homes or long-term care facilities, and healthcare workers and other first responders who are caring for those with COVID-19.

Additional Resources:

1. Local Resources:

- a. MTW District Health Department <https://mtwdistricthealth.org/>
- b. Washington County Web Page <https://www.washconc.org/> (contains info on most services/departments)
- c. Washington County Facebook Page <https://www.facebook.com/Washconc/>
- d. Washington Regional Medical Center (Privately Owned & Operated)
https://www.facebook.com/pg/washingtonregionalmedicalcenter/posts/?ref=page_internal

2. State Resources/Guidance:

- a. NC Dept. of Health & Human Services: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/>
NC Governor Cooper's Executive Orders: <https://governor.nc.gov/news/executive-orders>
- b. Text COVIDNC to 898-211 for announcements and updates
- c. Dial 2-1-1 or 888-892-1162 Available 24 hours a day 7 days a week
- d. NC Dept of Commerce/Unemployment Insurance: <https://des.nc.gov/need-help/covid-19-information>
- e. Golden Leaf Foundation: <https://www.goldenleaf.org/covid-19/>

3. Federal Resources/Guidance:

- a. CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- b. US Small Business Administration: <https://www.sba.gov/page/coronavirus-covid-19-small-business-guidance-loan-resources>

End of Press Release