

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

Division of Water

Standard Operating Procedure: Guidance for Field Work During COVID-19 Pandemic

April 24, 2020

Prepared by:  Date: 04/30/2020
Debra Hanas, Division of Water Health and Safety Coordinator

Approved by:  Date: 04/30/2020
Alexander Smith, Chief of Water Quality Standards and Analytical Support

Note: Division of Water (DOW) SOP revisions from year 2016 forward will only capture the current year parties involved with drafting/revising/approving the SOP on the cover page. The dated signatures of those parties will be captured here as well. The historical log of all SOP updates and revisions (past & present) will immediately follow the cover page.

SOP # 603-20 Update Log¹

Prepared/Revised By:	Date	Approved By	Revision No:	Summary of Changes

¹ The detailed 'Update Log' for DOW SOPs was adopted in 2016. The log may not be complete for updates conducted prior to 2016.

- 1. Vehicles**
- 2. Lodging**
- 3. Accessing Public Areas and Businesses**
- 4. Social Distancing**
- 5. Personal Hygiene**
- 6. Cleaning and Disinfecting Surfaces**
- 7. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**
- 8. Medical Care and Self-Monitoring**
- 9. Waste Disposal**

This guidance contains information, recommendations, and requirements for New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), Division of Water (DOW) staff in order to reduce risk of exposure and spread of novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) when working in the field. These guidelines are not all-encompassing and should be tailored to individual work site and program needs. All pertinent standard operating procedures and quality assurance project plans should be reviewed for adherence to these guidelines in advance of field work.

1. Vehicles

Staff should wash their hands or use an approved hand sanitizer before and after they disinfect, operate, or ride in a vehicle. This reduces the germs you bring into a vehicle, spread around inside, and limits the risk of transmitting the virus from your vehicle to others and vice versa. Consider carrying your own pen or pencil for completing the daily vehicle use log for fleet vehicles. During vehicle operation, staff should avoid touching their face and may wish to wear disposable gloves as an added precaution.

Vehicle Disinfection

Vehicles should be disinfected prior to use. Since the virus can survive for up to 72-hours on surfaces, the vehicle should be left for at least 72-hours without use, if possible. Keep vehicle doors open while disinfecting. Disposable gloves should be worn during the disinfecting process. Staff should wipe down, at a minimum, all vehicle contact surfaces prior to and after each vehicle use with an approved disinfecting product (see Section 6). Contact surfaces include door handles, steering wheel, turn signal levers, gear mechanism, control panel knobs and buttons, mirrors, etc. Fleet vehicle mileage sheet binders and car keys should also be disinfected. If using a rental vehicle, disinfect in the same manner. Once disinfecting is completed, wash hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Wait until surfaces have dried before riding in the vehicle.

Avoid using bleach, hydrogen peroxide or ammonia-based cleaning products (which can be found in “blue glass cleaners”) when possible because of their potential to damage car interiors. Ammonia breaks down vinyl, making it sticky when subjected to heat and light. Also, to avoid damaging anti-glare coatings, the glass cleaner should not be used on touch display screens.

In addition to the minimum disinfection of vehicle surfaces described above, staff may clean vehicle fabric and upholstery such as seats, seatbelt, trunk, etc. with a cloth, soap and water if desired. If doing so, do not let water soak through the fabric to the cushion, which could encourage mold growth. Instead, lightly agitate the fabric using the cloth and a small amount of water and soap. Spray disinfectants like household aerosol sprays (e.g., Lysol®) can also be used on fabric and other soft or porous surfaces in the vehicle.

See the following CDC guidance:

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/disinfecting-transport-vehicles.html?deliveryName=USCDC_10_4-DM26172

Vehicle Use

As a result of social distancing guidance (see Section 4), the use of multiple vehicles is recommended for field work when possible. However, in instances where the use of multiple vehicles is not practicable, staff must wear a mask or cloth face covering (see Section 7) when more than one person is present in a vehicle. When multiple vehicles are used, staff may take the additional measure of designating the equipment necessary for each person to complete their assigned tasks and maintain that equipment in their respective vehicle for the duration of the field work.

According to the CDC, you should avoid using the recirculated air option on the vehicle’s ventilation system and instead use the vehicle’s vents to bring in fresh outside air and/or lower the vehicle windows.

When pumping fuel, wear a glove or use the paper towels provided at the pump (or your own) to act as a barrier when holding the dispenser handle, using the pump keypad, or using the building door handle if going inside. Use a disinfecting wipe to clean the credit card after use.

2. Lodging

For some field work activities an overnight stay in a hotel is unavoidable. For those instances where a hotel stay is required, DEC has prepared a guidance document called “NYSDEC Best Practices for Hotel Stay During the COVID-19 Pandemic” with procedures to follow in order to reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19 during a hotel stay. The DEC guidance document is referenced at the end of this document. Main points include:

Avoid direct skin contact with high-contact surfaces such as door handles, reception counters and pens, elevator buttons, bathroom fixtures, common area computers and exercise equipment, conference room furniture and light switches, etc. Use a tissue or paper towel to create a barrier between you and high-contact surfaces and dispose immediately after use.

Consider Bringing the Following Items with You

- Hand sanitizer
- Disinfecting wipes and/or disinfecting cleaner and paper towels
- Disposable gloves
- Tissues
- Your own thermometer
- Your own pen for use during registration at the front desk
- Personal bedding: pillow, sleeping bag

In Your Room

Since it is impossible to know if the person who stayed in the same room before you had an illness, it is best to be proactive by wiping down surfaces with a disinfecting wipe and increasing your hand hygiene practices:

- **After entering your room, head to the sink and wash your hands.** Prior to entering your room, you probably touched doorknobs, elevator buttons, and light switches. Common touch points are places where germs may linger.
- Your hotel room should be clean upon arrival, but that doesn't mean the housekeepers did a deep clean of all surfaces. To be safe, **use a disinfecting wipe on the surfaces that are known to harbor germs**, such as the remote control, light switches, bedside lamp switches, the alarm clock, the phone and the bathroom sink - essentially any surface that is frequently touched. Also use a disinfecting wipe to clean your credit card if it was handled by hotel staff at the reception desk.
- **Consider not using the comforter.** Comforters are typically washed on occasion, but rarely between guests. Many hotel comforters are not designed for routine washing or the use of disinfectants in the wash. Consider bringing your own sleeping bag and pillow, removing the comforter and placing the sleeping bag directly on the sheets.

3. Accessing Public Areas and Businesses

Field work often requires visitation of public areas and businesses. These high use areas can be contact points for transmission of COVID-19. When visiting highway rest areas,

gas stations, shipping centers such as USPS, UPS, or FedEx, convenience stores, restaurants, etc. park away from other vehicles. Avoid direct skin contact with common touch surfaces such as door handles, paper towel dispensers, restroom doors, faucet handles, counters, tables, etc. Either wear gloves or use a barrier such as a paper towel, which should then be disposed prior to re-entering your vehicle. Consider carrying your own pen for signing paperwork at shipping centers, completing field paperwork, etc. Use a disinfecting wipe to clean your credit card if it was handled by someone other than yourself while completing a transaction.

Practice social distancing as much as practicable when visiting businesses and working near or interacting with the public, who may be encountered while they recreate (walking, biking, fishing, etc.) or are near the work site. A mask or cloth face covering must be worn when social distancing cannot be maintained (see Section 7).

4. Social Distancing

Social (physical) distancing means maintaining a distance of **at least six feet** ($\geq 6\text{ft}$) from other people. Social distancing should always be practiced, whether outdoors, in vehicles, or indoors. Consider in advance how you will implement social distancing preparing to leave for, traveling to, and performing duties while at the work site.

Additional Measures to Reduce Exposure Between Coworkers

To minimize exposure between field staff, equipment and tasks should be assigned to each individual before field work begins. Unless equipment is disinfected between uses, staff should maintain consistent use of that equipment and performance of specified tasks to prevent cross contamination between coworkers. For example, one person should handle all coolers and packing materials, one person should handle water quality sensors, one person should handle all field sheets and paperwork, etc. These decisions should be clearly defined and communicated at the beginning of each day and before leaving for the work site.

5. Personal Hygiene

Hand Washing and Sanitizing

Clean your hands often by washing them with soap and water for ≥ 20 seconds. Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly dirty. It is especially important to clean your hands after using the bathroom, before eating, and after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.

Hand sanitizer and wipes are not as effective as hand washing with soap and water but can be used as an interim measure if washing facilities are not available. If you do not

have access to soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60-95% alcohol.

Field work often requires traveling long distances without readily available access to facilities with running water. Therefore, field staff may want to consider carrying portable hand washing stations in field vehicles to accommodate frequent hand washing. You can create a portable hand washing station to use at the back of your field vehicle by carrying hand soap, paper towels and a carboy filled with clean tap water.

Follow these five steps every time you wash your hands

1. **Wet** your hands with clean, running water. Turn off the tap and apply soap.
2. **Lather** your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
3. **Scrub** your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the “Happy Birthday” song from beginning to end twice.
4. **Rinse** your hands well under clean, running water.
5. **Dry** your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

See the following CDC guidance regarding hand washing and hand sanitizer:

<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>

See these CDC videos for demonstrations on proper hand washing technique:

<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/videos.html>

Preventive Measures

- Always cover your cough or sneeze and turn away from anyone near you. Do not cough or sneeze into your bare hands; use a tissue or the crook of your arm at your elbow. Immediately dispose of used tissues.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unclean hands
- Avoid touching common surfaces with bare hands
- Do not share phones or other personal use items
- Limit the use of personal field gear to single individuals wherever possible
- Upon return to the office after completing field work, wash or disinfect your hands. Consider changing your work clothes and shoes prior to leaving the office and arriving at home. Wash your hands upon arrival at home. Launder work clothes separate from other laundry using the warmest appropriate settings.

6. Cleaning and Disinfecting Surfaces

The terms cleaning and disinfecting are not interchangeable when describing precautions to prevent COVID-19 exposure. Cleaning is the removal of visible dirt or debris. Disinfection is killing of microorganisms, which is the goal. If surfaces need cleaning, this should be done prior to disinfecting.

The exterior surface of coolers should be wiped thoroughly with a disinfecting wipe or solution upon receipt of the cooler and before sample bottle preparation begins. Staff should practice proper hand washing before and after conducting sample bottle preparation.

- Ensure there are adequate supplies to support cleaning and disinfecting practices before you head out to the field. These should be provided to you directly by DOW Health and Safety or purchased by your program. Standard purchasing requirements for commodities apply. If DOW programs have trouble locating and purchasing the appropriate cleaning and disinfecting supplies due to current supply chain interruptions, they should inform both DOW Health and Safety Program management and their program's management.
- Refer to CDC guidance for cleaning and disinfecting procedures:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

- Use disinfecting products that are on the DEC-approved list for use against COVID-19. For a list of products, see DEC's COVID-19 web page (look under "DEC-Approved Disinfectants", "Protect Yourself") which is referenced at the end of this document, or the CDC web page above in this Section, after "CDC guidance for cleaning surfaces". The DEC has also prepared a list of DEC-approved disinfecting wipes and their anticipated availability, which is referenced at the end of this document.
- Read and follow the label's instructions for all cleaning and disinfecting products (e.g., safety requirements, protective equipment use, concentration, contact time).
- Establish adequate time in the workday to allow for proper cleaning and disinfecting procedures, including prior to leaving the job site for the day.

7. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- PPE is supplied to field staff either through the DOW Health and Safety program or directly by field programs themselves. Standard purchasing requirements for commodities apply. If DOW programs have trouble locating and purchasing the appropriate PPE due to current supply chain interruptions, they should inform both DOW Health and Safety Program management and their program's management.
- Be sure to both put on and remove PPE properly in order to avoid contamination: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/pdfs/PPE-Sequence-508.pdf>
- Gloves should be worn during all normal field work activities such as collecting samples, packaging shipments, and cleaning equipment. A clean, separate pair of gloves should be used when transitioning to new tasks. When changing gloves, wash hands or use hand sanitizer before putting on the new pair if possible. Refer to appropriate quality assurance project plans and standard operating procedures for method requirements related to frequency of standard glove changes.

See the video "How to Safely Remove Disposable Gloves" posted under "Personal Protective Equipment Guidance and Training" at DEC's COVID-19 web page which is referenced at the end of this document.

- Safety glasses should be worn. They provide protection when handling sample preservatives, using disinfecting products, etc.
- The wearing of a mask or cloth face covering is required during field work and other times when staff must be in close proximity with each other and social distancing measures cannot be maintained. Disposable masks should be replaced daily. Even while wearing a mask or cloth face covering, social distancing measures should still be followed (≥ 6 ft) as much as possible. The cloth face coverings recommended for use by the CDC are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Standard, disposable surgical masks, or N-95 masks are also acceptable if they can be obtained. However, these are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current NYSDOH and CDC guidance.

According to the CDC, cloth face coverings should

- Be secured with ties or ear loops
- Fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- Include multiple layers of fabric
- Allow for breathing without restriction
- Be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape

See the memo “DEC COVID-19 Face Covering Guidance” under “DEC/DOH Memos” at DEC’s COVID-19 web page which is referenced at the end of this document.

See the CDC’s guidance on cloth face coverings:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

The following video shows how to properly put on and remove a surgical mask and should be watched prior to using one:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VbojLOQe94&app=desktop>

If respiratory issues (e.g., from heat exhaustion, over-exertion) arise when wearing a mask or cloth face covering, you should remove it, maintain social distancing and either rest until recovered or seek immediate medical attention.

8. Medical Care and Self-Monitoring

- Be aware of the location of the closest medical care facilities in relation to your field work site
- Stay home if you are sick or if you live with or have had close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19. Refer to NYSDOH guidelines on returning to work if you have already had COVID-19.
- Maintain flexibility when in the field if you need to alter work plans or return home due to sudden illness. If you realize you do not feel well, stop work and go home.

9. Waste Disposal

Used PPE and other waste generated during field work should be collected throughout the day in a garbage bag that has been placed inside a waste receptacle container at the start of field work each day. At the end of the day, the garbage bag should be securely closed and disposed in an outdoor trash receptacle at the lab/office. The waste receptacle container should then be washed or disinfected.

Additional Resources

NYSDEC Health & Safety Unit, COVID-19 Page:
<https://nysemail.sharepoint.com/sites/DECInSite-OER/SitePages/Coronavirus.aspx>

For “NYSDEC Best Practices for Hotel Stay During COVID-19 Pandemic”

look under “Travel Precautions and Restrictions”

For “NYSDEC Disinfecting Wipes Anticipated Availability”
look under “Protect Yourself”

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/>

NYS Department of Health: <https://www.health.ny.gov/>