



F R O M	Name & Title	Letitia Dzirasa, M.D., Commissioner 	Health Department AGENCY REPORT	
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	Subject: Position:	CC #19-0156R FAVORABLE		

To: President and Members
of the City Council
c/o 409 City Hall

September 25, 2019

The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) is pleased to have the opportunity to review City Council Bill #19-0156R, entitled “Informational Hearing - Water Outages.” This resolution seeks a discussion regarding “protocols in place for and best practices to provide assistance to Baltimore City residents in the event they lose access to water.”

BCHD recognizes that Baltimore City has an aging water and wastewater infrastructure and that the City routinely suffers severe water main breaks. We agree that access to clean and safe water is a public health priority and that water main breaks pose a threat to public health if clean and safe water is not accessible to residents. Exposure to dirty or unclean water can cause disease and illness.

Our authority to respond to events, such as the water main break affecting Poe Homes in June of this year, derives from the health department’s authority to prevent the spread of communicable disease under Title 4 of the Health Code and to investigate nuisances as outlined in Title 5 of the Health Code.

BCHD responds to communicable disease reports received from health care providers; institutions, laboratories, schools, and others as outlined in COMAR 10.06.01.01 C. Individuals who are ill should always seek medical care through their regular healthcare provider. It is the duty of the healthcare provider to report a communicable disease to the local health department. Individuals who contact the health department, and believe they are ill due to a communicable disease, are referred to their health care provider.

BCHD generally responds to water loss and other related complaints as they are reported to us whether directly through contact with the department or through the City’s 311 system.

To provide an example of BCHD’s response to water outages, our agency took the following key actions with respect to the Poe Homes incident earlier this year:

- The Maryland Food Bank reached out through the Code Red program to ask how they could donate water and BCHD provided contact information.

- BCHD's Bureau of Environmental Health contacted restaurants in the outage footprint to ensure no one was operating without water.
- Commissioner Dzirasa participated in interagency calls and meetings held to address the ongoing situation and provide medical/public health consultation as needed.
- BCHD's Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response liaised with the Department of Public Works (DPW) regarding water testing following reports of possible rashes at Poe Homes.
- BCHD's Office of Acute Communicable Diseases consulted with a local hospital regarding one case of rash, ultimately diagnosed as contact dermatitis and was not linked to the water outage.
- The Bureau of Environmental Health responded to one odor complaint which was made three days after the complainant had been on site. At the time of investigation, there was no odor except for a faint deodorizer smell from the spot-a-pots.
- One Legionella case in a Poe Homes residence was reported to BCHD in mid-July. The Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) and DPW were both notified of the case as the onset of symptoms occurred during the water outage. HABC was provided with guidance regarding Legionella risk management for building water systems. There was no conclusive determination of where the resident was exposed to Legionella bacteria.
- BCHD participated in a HABC-hosted community event on July 1, 2019.

As noted above, the Baltimore City Health Department understands the risks associated with water outages, however brief they may be, and actively seeks to respond upon learning of said occurrences. We believe that a conversation is warranted to discuss inter- and intra-agency responses to such events, and so urge a **favorable** report on Council Bill #19-0156R.