



Water dispensers in the workplace

Accessing safe drinking water
after COVID-19 lockdown



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As businesses seek some normality in a return to the workplace following lockdown, they require guidance to ensure the safety of their employees, visitors and customers. With the viral nature of COVID-19, organisations will need to mandate a doubling-down on hygiene practices and become much more careful about the products they use.

This paper has been prepared to offer practical insights and measures to help authorities and organisations set the necessary protocols to mitigate the risks of using drinking water dispensers in the workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The information aims to support getting people back to work and safely hydrated in environments such as offices, warehouses, hospitality, education and healthcare settings.





What this paper covers

In this paper, we cover the use of freestanding and integrated drinking water dispensers that are connected directly to the main supply of water into the premises, as well as bottled water coolers.

There are a number of shared resources in the workplace, all of which have the potential to facilitate viral cross-contamination. Think about mugs, cutlery, the office photocopier, the shared fridge, the water dispenser. But prohibiting access to essential equipment is counterproductive to maintaining a functional working environment. A balance must be struck to allow people to safely access the same office-critical resources with confidence.

There will be some very obvious choices to be made, but equally some that require a more educated and informed approach. Just as with most high-touch office equipment, the risks posed by the use of drinking water dispensers needs to be understood.

The following pages provide some background on the different drinking water facilities available plus recommended measures on how to get machines up and running after a period of closure and how to keep them operating safely.

Product capabilities and operation



Freestanding dispensers

Mains-fed freestanding dispensers typically use UV light to purify water against bacteria, viruses and cysts to over 99% in some cases. This prevents germs contaminating drinking water and causing illness.

Many freestanding dispensers also use an antimicrobial infusion or coating on key surfaces, particularly around the dispensing area – buttons, nozzle and drip tray. This provides an added layer of defence against contamination from bacteria, viruses and mould. An antimicrobial feature is highly recommended as the protection works continuously with over 99% efficacy in some cases. Coupled with regular sanitisation of the machine as part of workplace cleaning practices, this goes a long way to ensuring optimum hygiene.



Integrated dispensers

Integrated dispensers use under-counter systems to filter the water from the mains supply through to a tap on the surface.

They typically dispense a variety of water types including boiling and sparkling. Most do not offer antimicrobial protection or water purification, just filtration to remove contaminants like sediment, pollen and rust, as well as chemicals including chlorine and pesticides.

The tap and font should be sanitised regularly throughout the day to ensure hygienic operation.

Product capabilities and operation



Bottled water coolers

Water coolers use large bottles of naturally sourced water. Particularly useful where there is no access to the mains water supply, water coolers require bottles of water to be delivered and stored on the premises.

Bottles require handling right from source through to warehousing, delivery, storage, usage and dispatching empties. Businesses should look to enhance hygiene protocols around the handling of bottles before and after use.



Single-use plastic bottles

As with bottled water coolers, single-use bottles require handling right from source through to warehousing, delivery, purchase and storage. They also require responsible disposal, both in terms of the contamination risk they pose and their impact on the environment.

If the provision of drinking water is largely satisfied by bottled water, there could be a number of part-consumed bottles in the workplace at any one time. There is an inherent risk in spreading the virus through the unintended sharing of those bottles or indeed in picking the bottles up to dispose.



Cold water tap

Water from the cold tap found at the kitchen sink can be accessed by anyone in the building. It is an extremely high-touch facility, often used for hand and dish washing also. Most taps have no antimicrobial surface protection offering a layer of defence against surface contamination.

An extremely high level of hygiene would need to be maintained in order to keep the sink tap clean. It can become easily contaminated by the hands of an infected person, if that person coughs or sneezes close-by or touches the nozzle with bottles and glasses. The water quality may also be questionable depending on location.

How to access safe drinking water in the workplace

The following guidelines set out how workplaces can get safely up-and-running following a period of closure, as well as daily hygiene protocols.

Using a drinking water dispenser for the first time

Many workplaces will have been closed for a period of time during the COVID-19 lockdown. Before using a dispenser, machine or equipment for the first time following a dormant period, we recommend taking the following steps to ensure that any harmful bacteria and toxins are removed and the water is safe to drink:

- If a mains-fed machine has had a break in operation, dispense a minimum of 5 litres/1 gallon each of ambient, cold and sparkling water, and 3 litres/0.6 gallons minimum of hot water. Dispose of the water.
- If a bottled water cooler has had a break in operation, replace the bottle with a new sealed bottle of water.
- Sanitise all external surfaces of the machine and bottle, including all nozzles/taps/tap handles, decals, drip trays and fonts using a food grade sanitiser.
- Wash all glassware, re-usable bottles, carafes and other drinking vessels by hand using hot water and dishwashing liquid, then rinse. Place in a dishwasher or glass washer and run through two wash cycles to clear any residue.
- For ice dispensers, dispose of any stored ice and the first set of freshly made ice before use.
- For coffee machines empty coffee deposit trays that have any remnants of coffee. Run at least 1 litre/0.2 gallons of hot water through the coffee machine and dispense 3-4 cups of coffee before using.



Enhancing day-to-day hygiene protocols

New habits and behaviours will need to be adopted, and every opportunity should be taken to encourage regular sanitisation of equipment and consumables as well as heightened personal hygiene protocols to help prevent the spread of germs.



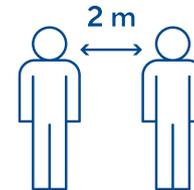
Hand hygiene

Hands should be washed with soap and water or sanitised with an alcohol-based gel before and after using a dispenser. Germs can be spread through person-to-person contact with surfaces. Washing hands kills the virus and prevents the spread of COVID-19. We recommend keeping a hand sanitiser within easy reach of the dispenser.



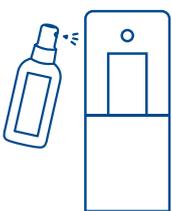
Respiratory hygiene

Hands should be washed with soap and water or sanitised with an alcohol-based gel before and after using a dispenser. Germs can be spread through person-to-person contact with surfaces. Washing hands kills the virus and prevents the spread of COVID-19. We recommend keeping a hand sanitiser within easy reach of the dispenser.



Social distancing

Users should keep a safe distance from others at the water dispenser. It is recommended that a distance of at least 1 metre/3ft be maintained at all times



Dispenser sanitisation

Use an alcohol-based spray disinfectant or disposable disinfectant wipes to sanitise the dispenser regularly, paying particular attention to the dispensing area. Users can become infected by touching contaminated surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

This is one of the main ways that COVID-19 spreads. Additionally, for bottled water coolers pay particular attention to the bottle opening when attaching it to the cooler. Disposable gloves should be worn or hands thoroughly washed/sanitised before opening the bottle and lifting it in place. When bottles are delivered to the workplace, sanitise the exterior surfaces of the bottle with an alcohol-based disinfectant spray or wipe.



Sanitisation and disposal of glasses and cups

All glassware, re-usable bottles, carafes and other drinking vessels must be washed in a dishwasher or glass washer after every use without exception. A second cycle for all items is recommended. If disposable cups are used, encourage disposal after each use. Disposable cups should not be reused or left for others to dispose of.



Enforcing protocols

Dispensers will likely be located in communal areas such as the reception, kitchen, communal eating area, public space, hallway, for example. To help enforce protocols for use of the dispenser, we recommend including instructions on social distancing and hygiene.

This can be in the form of posters, stickers or tent cards placed on or around the dispenser and socialised accordingly to all staff and visitors. Other measures could include redesigning the office layout by introducing barriers and guards to better allow for social distancing in public or communal areas.

Site visits

Engineers and technicians who visit premises to deliver bottles, install or service dispensers should follow strict hygiene protocols that include maintaining a safe distance from others; applying hand sanitiser before and after every site visit; wearing latex disposable gloves throughout the visit; and using sanitiser to disinfect the bottle and/or dispenser.

Regular maintenance is recommended to ensure that the machine is safely performing at its best. This includes sanitisation of the dispenser, filter and UV lamp replacements where applicable.





Getting safely back to work

The provision of potable drinking water in the workplace is a right. It's vital for our health and wellbeing. It's therefore crucial that companies put the correct infection prevention measures in place to ensure that access to drinking water is not withheld but provided in the safest way possible to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Providing resources and a work environment that promotes handwashing, respiratory and distancing etiquette will help keep offices, warehouses, hospitality, education and healthcare settings open and operating safely.

By following strict hygiene standards across the workplace and choosing products that offer users maximum protection and security, businesses and organisations across all sectors can continue to offer access to a fresh, clean source of drinking water for their staff, patients and customers.

About Waterlogic

Waterlogic is an innovative designer, manufacturer, distributor and service provider of drinking water dispensers and solutions designed for environments such as offices, factories, hospitals, restaurants, hotels, schools and public spaces. From freestanding, countertop and integrated dispensers to water filling stations, fountains and boilers, every solution focuses on delivering the best quality water in the most sustainable way.

Founded in 1992, Waterlogic was one of the first companies to introduce mains-fed dispensers to customers worldwide, and has been at the forefront of the market promoting product design and water quality, the application of proprietary technologies, sustainability and world-class sales and service.

Waterlogic has its own subsidiaries in 17 countries and its leading markets are the US, Australia and Western Europe, in particular the UK and Germany. In addition, Waterlogic's extensive and expanding independent global distribution network reaches over 50 countries around the world in North and South America, Europe, Asia, Australia and South Africa.

Better thinking, better water,
better for you, better for the planet



Contact us for more details

brand@waterlogic.com

www.waterlogic.com