

## Health Advisory

### Protecting Patients from Utility Disconnections

April 10, 2024

#### SUMMARY POINTS

- Uninterrupted utility service is essential to physical and mental health.
- Medical professionals have an important role to play in keeping patients connected to utility service.

Pennsylvania's annual winter moratorium on utility shutoffs ended March 31. This means that PECO, PGW, and PWD may send shutoff notices and disconnect residential utility service related to bill nonpayment from now through November 30 (from Mondays through Thursdays, outside of holidays and heat emergencies).

Utility service is essential to public health, safety, and well-being. Water, power, and temperature control allow patients to manage existing medical conditions and prevent new ones from occurring. The Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) encourages medical professionals to support patients in maintaining uninterrupted utility service. What you can do:

- **Understand** existing shutoff protections and **discuss** them with patients.
- **Use** medical certifications to prevent utility shutoffs or restore service.
- **Connect** patients to utility assistance programs.

#### Existing shutoff protections

The Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) will refrain from shutting off or promptly reconnect water to any household that includes a **child** (under 18), an **older adult** (65+), or a person with a **disability/serious illness**, as well as to any **tenant** household where the water bill is in the landlord's name. Suppose a patient receives a shutoff notice or gets disconnected for nonpayment and fits any of those categories. In that case, they should **contact PWD** at 215-685-6300 or [wrbhelpdesk@phila.gov](mailto:wrbhelpdesk@phila.gov) to prevent a shutoff or restore water service. **No paperwork** is required. Additional information about existing PWD protections is available at <https://water.phila.gov/prevent-shutoff>. PECO and PGW do not provide equivalent protections.

#### Medical certifications

PDPH supports using medical certifications in **any situation in which a patient's physical or mental well-being could be compromised** by losing electricity, gas, or water service. Determining whether a patient or member of their household has a medical condition that will be worsened by loss of utility service resides entirely with the physician, nurse practitioner, or physician's assistant – not with the utility.

Medical certifications protect against shutoff for 30 days and can be renewed for additional 30-day periods. Paired with referrals to longer-lasting assistance, medical certifications can prevent many adverse consequences for public health, safety, and well-being.

Medical certification requires the information in the following forms (whether via the form or other format):

- PECO and PGW use the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission's [Standard Medical Certification Form](#)
- [PWD Medical Certification Form](#) (though see also simplified process, in previous section)

#### Utility assistance programs

Helping patients access more affordable utility bills can prevent shutoffs, debt, and other hardships. Programs include:

- PECO: <https://www.peco.com/my-account/customer-support/assistance-programs/cap-rate>
- PGW: <https://www.pgworks.com/customer-care/crp>
- PWD: <https://www.phila.gov/services/water-gas-utilities/pay-or-dispute-a-water-bill/water-bill-customer-assistance/>
- LIHEAP: <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Assistance/Pages/LIHEAP.aspx>
- UESF: <https://uesfacts.org/our-programs/utility-grant-program/>

If you have **questions** about any of the above, please contact PDPH Public Policy Advisor Ben Hartung at [Benjamin.Hartung@phila.gov](mailto:Benjamin.Hartung@phila.gov).