

Health Advisory

Using Medical Certifications to Prevent Residential Water Service Shutoffs

July 11, 2022

SUMMARY POINTS

- Identify patients with serious illnesses who have been shut off or have a water shutoff scheduled because of nonpayment.
- Write medical certifications for patients and/or other residents of the home who qualify.
- Educate patients about PWD's new protections for low-income households and seniors.

Beginning Wednesday July 20, 2022, the Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) will resume shutting off residential water service for nonpayment. PWD had suspended water shutoffs for nonpayment for two years pursuant to a COVID-19 pandemic moratorium. **Medical professionals play an important role in protecting Philadelphians from water shutoffs. PWD will restore residential water service and will delay scheduled shutoffs upon written certification from a physician, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant that a customer, member of the customer's household, or resident of the residential property is "seriously ill."** PWD and the Water Revenue Bureau are also taking new steps to help people who are struggling to pay.

Customers can start the medical delay process by calling 215-685-6300; they then will need a written medical certification within 7 business days. **The medical certification form, with instructions on how to submit, is available at www.phila.gov/media/20220705142450/Water-customer-medical-emergency-form.pdf.**

Medical certifications will delay shutoff for 30 days or restore water service for 30 days at homes that have been shut off and can be renewed for an additional 30 days with another certification form. Illnesses lasting more than 9 months could qualify customers for lower bills.

The definition of “serious illnesses” qualifying for medical exemption is up to the discretion of the individual’s licensed medical provider. Even common illnesses and chronic conditions can be significantly exacerbated by the loss of water service. **The Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) supports use of medical certifications because residential water service is essential to the health of ill patients and to broader public health outcomes.**

PDPH recommends that medical providers consult with patients about whether they are facing financial difficulties that jeopardize their water utility service. **Patients who are not seriously ill, but fear loss of water service, should be informed about ways they can prevent shutoff:**

- Customers **seeking Customer Assistance** are exempt from shutoff for 14 days after requesting an application and during application processing. (cap.phila.gov/start)
- Customers **enrolled in the Tiered Assistance Program (TAP)**, are exempt from shutoff. (cap.phila.gov/start)
 - Residents below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level or who have special hardships
- Customers **enrolled in the Senior Citizen Discount Program** are exempt from shutoff. (<https://www.phila.gov/services/water-gas-utilities/pay-or-dispute-a-water-bill/senior-citizen-water-bill-discount/>)
 - Residents who are at least 65 years old, live at the address listed on the application, have the water and sewer bill in their name, and have a total annual income (for all household members) of \$32,300 or less.

Additional information about preventing water service shutoffs is available at:

www.phila.gov/services/water-gas-utilities/water-shutoffs/prevent-water-shutoffs/

PWD customers can also call 215-685-6300 to set up a payment plan or for more information.