



Best Septic System Management During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, many people are spending more time in their homes than usual, whether working from home or for sheltering from the virus. Whilst advances are being made in potential vaccines and control of the disease, the fear of secondary spikes and our relatively poor understanding of Covid-19 mean many are still forced to remain largely at home. With no real ending in sight it is important that those at home are aware of the potential strains that may be being put on their septic systems, and how they might alleviate those strains.

Why should I be concerned about my septic system?

Septic systems are designed to dose fluid into the drainlines, allowing time for it to enter the soil and move away from the system. If too much fluid is put into the drainlines it may not be able to enter the soil fast enough and the system begin to back up and will eventually fail. For every flush of the toilet, or shower, or use of the washing machine, an equivalent quantity of water will enter the drainfield. With people spending more time at home, more fluid will be being added to the system increasing the chances of failure.

How can I reduce the stress on my septic system?

Try to spread out daily and reduce daily water use

One of the benefits of being home is that you can spread your water using activities and chores out across the day. Allow plenty of time between showering, running the dish washer, running the washing machine, or having a bath. This will allow time for water entering your drainfield to move into the soil. It is highly recommended you shower instead of bathe, as showering can use roughly one third of the quantity of water of a bath.

Be careful what goes down your drain

In your septic tank, solids are broken down by bacteria. These bacteria are sensitive to what is put down the drain. Whilst it may be tempting to use an antibacterial handwash when washing your hands, the antibacterial agents are not good for the bacteria in your septic system. Instead use soap and water, which are exceedingly effective at breaking down the virus structure and rendering it harmless.

The use of bleach can also be problematic, many people are keen to use bleach to make sure any clothing used in public areas is clean and free of potential Covid-19. Whilst septic systems can handle certain quantities of bleach and antibacterial solution due to dilution within the tank, excess use of these can cause death of the bacteria which will result in system failure. The CDC does not recommend using

bleach for cleaning clothes, but rather it recommends washing clothing in accordance with manufacturer's instructions at the highest recommended temperature to remove the virus. If bleach must be used, consider using less and saving all clothes you wish to bleach for larger loads, thus limiting the quantity that is put into the system.

Try flushing less often

Because people are spending more time at home rather than at school or at work, your toilet facilities are more than likely being used to a greater extent. Consider only flushing once out of two or three visits for urine. Obviously, it is advisable to flush each time for excrement.

Follow best management practices

Follow best septic system management practices, including:

- Have your tank pumped regularly
- Reduce household water use
- Don't flush 'unflushables' down the toilet i.e. diapers & feminine hygiene products
- Don't put dangerous chemicals down the drain i.e. paint thinner
- Try not to use your garbage disposal system
- Monitor your septic system (including drainlines) regularly
- Don't build on or place anything heavy on your drainfield

By following these recommendations, you can help reduce the strain on your septic system during the current pandemic, decreasing your chances of further stress from a failed or failing septic system.

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