

# Trouble With Your Water Bill?

**PUBLIC  
ACCESS  
DESIGN**

Having trouble paying your water bills? New Yorkers have rights to avoid shut-offs during and after the **COVID-19 pandemic**.  
Learn more!

# Water is a human right!

We all need access to water, no matter our background or ability to pay for it. We use water daily to cook, clean, and protect ourselves from illnesses, like COVID-19.

If you fall behind on your water bills and your water gets shut off, it can be harder to meet your basic needs. It can also affect your credit scores, lease, and mortgage.

## Your rights depend on who supplies your water.

If you're having a hard time paying your bill, you have rights that protect your access to water. These rights depend on the type of water supplier you have.

Once you know your water supplier, use the chart on the right to see what rights you have.

90% of New Yorkers have a city/town supplier!

## If your water bill is from...



your town, city, or an *Authority* or *Department*, you have a **city/town supplier**.



*American Water* or *Suez*, you have a **large, private supplier**.



anyone else, you have a **small, private supplier**.

## You have the right to...

### City/town supplier

### Large supplier

### Small supplier

Advanced Shut-off Notice

MAYBE

YES

YES

File a Complaint

MAYBE

YES

YES

Medical Protections

MAYBE

YES

MAYBE

Ask for a Payment Plan

MAYBE

YES

MAYBE

Direct Payment

MAYBE

YES

YES

Keep reading to learn more about each!

1

2

## Advanced Shut-off Notice

Large and small private water suppliers have to call, send a letter, or visit your home to warn you that they're going to shut off your water.

### They cannot shut off your water:

- Monday through Thursday, before 8AM and after 4PM
- On Friday, Saturdays, or Sundays
- On public holidays and the day before a public holiday
- From December 25 to January 1
- When the water supplier's office is closed

City/Town suppliers often don't give advance notice of a shut-off!

### File a Complaint

If you're charged too much on your bill, file a complaint. **Each water supplier has a different process.**

Filing a complaint puts payments on hold until the complaint is figured out. Your water supplier shouldn't ask you to pay your bill if your complaint hasn't been resolved.



If you have a **city/town supplier**, call them directly.



If you have a **large, private supplier**, call the Department of Public Service. (see last page for info)

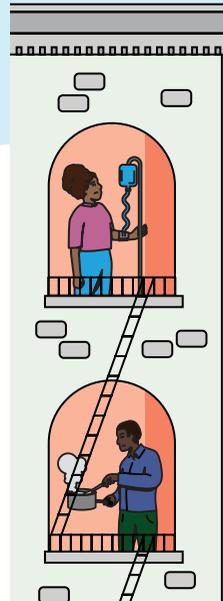


If you have a **small, private supplier**, call the Department of Public Service. (see last page for info)

## Medical Protections

If you or a family member have a **serious or chronic medical condition**, you can get a shut-off delayed by 30 days and get more time to pay your water bill. Send your water supplier a letter from your doctor that says why shutting off your water would harm or worsen you or your family's health.

If the letter is approved, you'll get 30 more days to pay your water bill. If you need more time after the first 30 days, send *another* letter. You can do this three times for a total of 90 days.



## Ask for a Payment Plan

If you're having trouble paying a water bill, a payment plan called a *Deferred Payment Agreement (DPA)* will break up your debt over monthly payments. The payments for a DPA are **added to** each month's bill.

### Here's an example:

- 1 You missed this month's bill of \$20.
- 2 You create a DPA to pay it off over two months (\$10 each month).
- 3 Next month's bill is \$20 + \$10 from your DPA payment.
- 4 Your total payment for next month is \$30.

To set up a DPA, call your water supplier and tell them you're having trouble paying your bill and would like to set up a monthly payment plan.

Only large water suppliers are *required* to set up DPAs.

If your water supplier gives you a DPA they have to agree to a monthly amount that makes sense for you. As long as you pay your DPA **and** your monthly bill, your water can't be shut off.

**If you can't afford a DPA payment, call your supplier immediately. Tell them you need to renegotiate your monthly payment; otherwise, your water can be shut off!**

## Direct Payment

If you know your landlord hasn't paid their water bill, contact your water supplier and see if you and your fellow tenants can pay it directly. If you can, get a pro bono/legal services attorney to help you deduct the payments from rent going forward.

## During the COVID-19 Pandemic

For people struggling to pay their bills during the pandemic, New York State created a **moratorium—a temporary relief from payment**. The moratorium stops water suppliers from shutting off someone's water because they can't pay their bills.

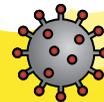
### The moratorium allows all New Yorkers to:

💧 **Get a DPA.** Call your water supplier right away to “self-certify” that your household finances have changed because of COVID-19. This will stop all shut-offs and give you the chance to set up a DPA so you can pay off your debt, affordably, over time.

💧 **File a complaint with the Department of Public Service (DPS).** The DPS is where complaints, for all water suppliers, are sent. Call the DPS to file a complaint if your water was



wrongfully shut off, your water supplier isn't working with you to self-certify or get a DPA, or if you're having trouble getting support because of a medical condition.



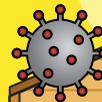
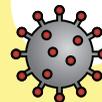
### C-19 BILL



Even if you didn't have these options before the pandemic, you have them now! If you “self-certify” with your water supplier, you have these protections until **December 21, 2021**.

If you self-certified OR you have a DPA and your water is shut off before December 21, 2021, file a complaint. After December 21, 2021, these protections end. Turn to the chart on page 2 to see what protections you'll have after the moratorium ends.

**To stay updated about the moratorium, go to [utilityproject.org](http://utilityproject.org)**



## Every time you talk to your water supplier:

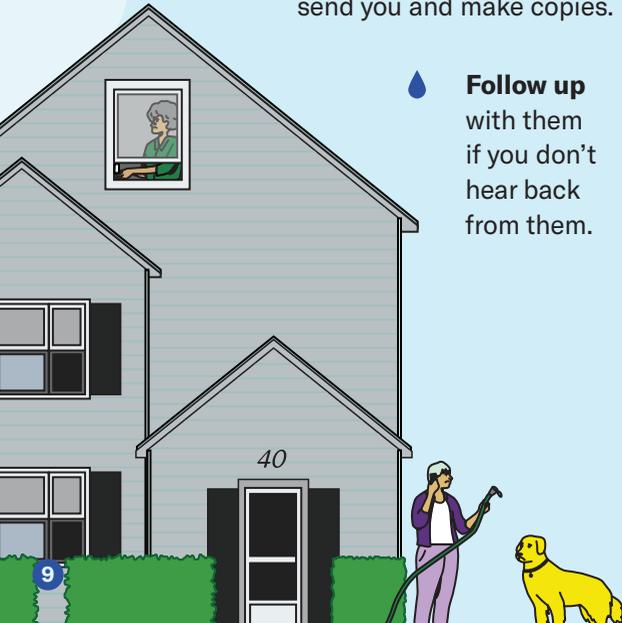
**Write** down who you spoke to, when, and how to reach them.

**Send** them a letter or email to confirm what you talked about.

**Ask** for answers and agreements in writing.

**Keep** any documents they send you and make copies.

**Follow up** with them if you don't hear back from them.



## Get Support

**Department of Public Service**

☎ 800-342-3377  
📧 dps.ny.gov

If you think your water supplier is violating your rights or you need to file a complaint during the moratorium, contact the Department of Public Service (DPS).

**Public Utility Law Project**

☎ 877-669-2572  
📧 info@utilityproject.org

If you have questions about your rights, think they've been violated, or you need help filing a complaint or making a direct payment, call the Public Utility Law Project (PULP).



## **PUBLIC ACCESS DESIGN**

This project was produced through Public Access Design, a program of the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP). Public Access Design projects use design to make complex urban issues accessible to the people most affected by them.

## **CENTER FOR URBAN PEDAGOGY**

The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) is a nonprofit that uses the power of art and design to increase meaningful civic engagement in partnership marginalized communities. [welcometocup.org](http://welcometocup.org)

## **THE PUBLIC UTILITY LAW PROJECT**

Since 1981, The Public Utility Law Project of New York (PULP) has been the sole independent organization educating, advocating, and litigating on behalf of New York's low-income utility consumers. [utilityproject.org](http://utilityproject.org)

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