

Frequently Asked Questions about Drinking Water

Information provided by the Environmental Protection Agency

Q: How can I find out if my tap water is safe to drink?

A: Over 90 percent of water systems meet EPA's standards for tap water quality. The best source of specific information about your drinking water is your water supplier. Community water suppliers (that serve the same people year-round) are required to send their customers an annual Consumer Confidence Report (CCR). Contact your water supplier to get a copy or see if your report is posted on-line. For additional information, call the Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791; visit EPA's web sites on local drinking water at www.epa.gov/safewater or you may also contact the CTDPH Drinking Water Section (DWS).

Q. How will I know if my water isn't safe to drink?

A: Your water supplier must notify you by newspaper, mail, radio, TV, or hand-delivery if your water doesn't meet EPA or state standards or if there is a waterborne disease emergency. The notice will describe any precautions you need to take, such as boiling your water. Follow the advice of your water supplier if you ever receive such a notice. The most common drinking water emergency is contamination by disease-causing germs. Boiling your water for one minute will kill these germs. You can also use common household bleach or iodine to disinfect your drinking water at home in an emergency, such as a flood (ask for the DWS's Disinfection of a Well Water Supply Fact Sheet for specific directions on how to disinfect your drinking water).

Q: What's this new drinking water report that I've heard about?

A.: Water suppliers must deliver to their customers' annual CCRs. These reports will tell consumers what contaminants have been detected in their drinking water, how these detection levels compare to drinking water standards, and where their water comes from. The reports must be provided annually before July 1, and, in most cases, are mailed directly to customers' homes. Contact your water supplier to get a copy of your report, or see if your report is posted online.

Q. How can I get my water tested?

A. If your home is served by a community water system, get a copy of your annual CCR before you test your water. This report will tell you what contaminants have been found in your drinking water and at what level.

After you've read this report, you may wish to test for specific contaminants (such as lead) that can vary from house to house, or any other contaminant you're concerned about. You may call the DPH Laboratory Program at 860-509-7389 or the CTDPH DWS to get a list of certified laboratories in your state.

Q: I don't like the taste/smell/appearance of my tap water. What's wrong with it?

A: Even when water meets EPA's standards, you may still object to its taste, smell, or appearance. Common complaints about water aesthetics include temporary cloudiness (typically caused by air bubbles) or chlorine taste that can be improved by letting the water stand exposed to the air.

Q. I'm worried about a specific drinking water contaminant (lead, Cryptosporidium, nitrate, radon, etc.) What should I know?

A: Drinking water, including bottled water, may reasonably be expected to contain at least small amounts of some contaminants. As long as they occur below EPA's standards, they don't pose a significant threat to health, although people with severely compromised immune systems and children may have special needs. For more information about a specific contaminant, see EPA's fact sheets on drinking water contaminants, or call the CTDPH/DWS.

Q: What if I have a severely compromised immune system?

A: Some people may be more vulnerable to contaminants in drinking water than the general population. People with severely compromised immune systems, such as people with cancer undergoing chemotherapy, people who have undergone organ transplants, people with HIV/AIDS or other immune system disorders, some elderly, and infants can be particularly at risk from infections. These people should seek advice about drinking water from their health care providers. EPA/Centers for Disease Control guidelines on appropriate means to lessen the risk of infection from Cryptosporidium and other microbial contaminants offer more detailed advice.

Q: What should I do if I have my own drinking water well?

A: If you have your own well, you are responsible for making sure that your water is safe to drink. Private wells should be tested annually for nitrate and coliform bacteria to detect contamination problems early. Test more frequently and for other contaminants, such as radon or pesticides, if you suspect a problem. Check with your local health department and local public water systems that use ground water to learn more about well water quality in your area and what contaminants you are more likely to find. More information is available on EPA's page for private well owners. You can help protect your water supply by carefully managing activities near the water source.

Q. What about bottled water?

A: Bottled water is not necessarily safer than your tap water. EPA sets standards for tap water provided by public water systems; the Food and Drug Administration sets bottled water standards based on EPA's tap water standards. Bottled water and tap water are both safe to drink if they meet these standards, although people with severely compromised immune systems and children may have special needs. Some bottled water is treated more than tap water, while some is treated less or not treated at all. Bottled water costs much more than tap water on a per gallon basis. Bottled water is valuable in emergency situations (such as

floods and earthquakes), and high quality bottled water may be a desirable option for people with weakened immune systems. Consumers who choose to purchase bottled water should carefully read its label to understand what they are buying, whether it is a better taste, or a certain method of treatment.

Q: What about home water treatment units?

A: Most people do not need to treat their drinking water at home to make it safe. A home water treatment unit can improve water's taste, or provide an extra margin of safety for people more vulnerable to the effects of waterborne illness (people with severely compromised immune systems and children may have special needs). Consumers who choose to purchase a home water treatment unit should carefully read its product information to understand what they are buying, whether it is a better taste or a certain method of treatment. Be certain to follow the manufacturer's instructions for operation and maintenance, especially changing the filter on a regular basis. No single unit takes out every kind of drinking water contaminant; you must decide which type best meets your needs.

Q: Where does my drinking water come from?

A: Drinking water can come from either ground water sources (via wells) or surface water sources such as rivers, lakes, and streams. Approximately 64% of CT's population is served by large CWSs that possess the capability to deliver both ground and surface water supplies. Twenty-one percent of large systems in CT rely exclusively on surface supplies. Fifteen percent of people have their own private well for drinking water.

Q: How can I help to protect my drinking water?

A: Drinking water protection is a community wide effort, beginning with protecting the source of your water, and including education, and funding, and conservation. The CTDPH/DWD is responsible for developing and implementing the Source Water Assessment Program or SWAP for short. The goal of the SWAP is to assess the susceptibility of CT's drinking water sources to potential contamination. The SWAP is also now engaged in source water assessments, to work with communities to identify local sources of contamination. You can contact the SWAP for more information or log on to the DPH website.

Q: How many public water systems are there in Connecticut?

A: CT is one of the smallest States in the United States. It has 3.6 million people living in a land area of 4,844 square miles. Even though CT is small, it is home to over 2,500 public water systems. Community water systems (CWS) are systems that serve at least 25 individuals on a year round basis. Approximately seventy seven percent, or 2.8 million of CT's population of 3.6 million, are served by CWSs.

Q: Where can I get more information?

A: For more information on your drinking water, contact your water supplier. You can also contact the CTDPH DWS at 860-509-7333 or on the website at www.ct.gov/dph/publicdrinkingwater