

ARSENIC IN WELL WATER

Frequently Asked Questions

What is arsenic and where does it come from?

Arsenic is a naturally occurring element in the earth's crust. As water flows through certain rock formations, it can dissolve arsenic and carry it into underground aquifers, streams or rivers that may be used as drinking water sources.

What is the maximum contaminant level for arsenic in drinking water?

Arsenic is measured in parts per billion (ppb). The current drinking water standard for arsenic is 10 ppb. Because arsenic is a health hazard, OPH recommends switching to bottled water if your well water level is above 10 ppb.

How can arsenic affect my health?

Drinking water contaminated with high levels of arsenic puts your health at risk. Health effects may include:

- Thickening and discoloration of the skin, stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.
- Heart, lung, liver, immune, nervous, or reproductive system disorders and diabetes.
- Cancer of the bladder, lungs, skin, kidney, nasal passages, liver, and prostate.

Children are especially susceptible to the effects of arsenic due to their smaller size, and developing bodies and brains.

Should I boil my water if it has high levels of arsenic?

No. Boiling water can concentrate levels of arsenic. Boiling water does not remove arsenic.

Can I remove arsenic from my drinking water?

Yes. Several treatment methods can remove arsenic from drinking water. The most common treatment method used is called a reverse osmosis filtration system. Any system you select should be certified by a recognized, third-party testing organization that meets strict testing protocols established by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and NSF International.

Keep in mind that filters may not be effective in all cases. We recommend you continue testing your water on a yearly basis, and that any filtration equipment be well maintained to ensure proper functioning.

Can I wash my food with my well water?

We recommend that bottled water be used to wash, prepare and cook food if your water contains levels of arsenic above 10 ppb.

What about bathing and showering?

Bathing, swimming and showering with water that has levels as high as 500 ppb is safe as long as swallowing the water is avoided as much as possible. Arsenic doesn't readily enter the body through the skin. Keep in mind that small children will need supervision when bathing and brushing teeth in order to avoid swallowing the water.

Washing dishes, utensils, and food preparation areas:

Only very small amounts of water clings to smooth, nonporous surfaces, like dishes. You can safely use water having up to 500 ppb of arsenic to wash and sanitize dishes, tables and eating utensils.

General cleaning and laundry:

Very little water remains on washed surfaces and in laundered fabrics. Since these articles are not placed in the mouth, water having up to 500 ppb of arsenic may be safely used for general cleaning and washing of clothing, bedding and linens.

What about my pets?

Animals should not drink water that is above 10 ppb.

Where can I go to get my water tested?

Accredited laboratories throughout the state provide well water testing for private well owners. These labs can give you the information and instructions you need to have your well water tested. For a list of accredited laboratories in Oregon, call the Department of Human Services Laboratory Accreditation Program at 503-693-4122 or visit:

<http://oregon.gov/DHS/ph/orelap/docs/acclab.pdf>.

For more information:

For questions and concerns about arsenic in your well, please contact Sujata Joshi at 971-673-1213, or by email at sujata.joshi@state.or.us