DRINKING WATER QUALITY AND HEALTH

Drinking water should not contain disease-causing microorganisms or harmful chemicals. It should be clear, colourless and odourless. To ensure that drinking water meets the above criteria, Canada has negotiated a set of guidelines with the provinces.

Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality........................................ 2
Frequency of water testing........................................................................... 2
Domestic water quality................................................................................ 2
What is in water?........................................................................................... 2
Contaminants................................................................................................. 3
Sources of contamination.............................................................................. 3
Categories of contaminants.......................................................................... 3
Effects of contaminants in water................................................................. 3
Microorganisms.............................................................................................. 3
Some illnesses caused by waterborne bacterial pathogens............................. 4
Some illnesses caused by waterborne viral pathogens.................................... 5
Radio-nuclides................................................................................................. 5
Inorganics......................................................................................................... 5
Health Effects and some common source contamination of some inorganic chemicals................................. 6
Organics........................................................................................................... 6
Health Effects and some common source contamination of some organic compounds................................................................. 7
Disinfectants................................................................................................. 7
Disinfection by-products................................................................................. 7
Common problems in surface water sources................................................. 8
Common problems in ground water sources.................................................. 8
Water Treatment............................................................................................. 8
Filtration......................................................................................................... 8
Oxidation........................................................................................................ 8
Sedimentation................................................................................................. 8
Disinfection...................................................................................................... 9
Distillation....................................................................................................... 9
Responsibility and stewardship..................................................................... 9
Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality

Lists of contaminants that should not be present in drinking water at concentrations exceeding Maximum Acceptable concentrations (MAC). Some contaminants may still be under review, therefore an Interim MAC (IMAC) has been set. The Guideline also contains Aesthetic Objectives (AO) for compounds that may not have a health impact, but can still be a nuisance.

Frequency of water testing

The frequency of water testing depends upon:
• The quality of the source water
• The number of water sources
• Past frequency of unsatisfactory results
• Adequacy of treatment
• Capacity of treatment plant
• Practice of disinfection
• Size of population
• Ranges of 2 times per year to 90 times per month

Health related parameters

In general, drinking water should be sampled semi-annually for all chemical substances for which MAC and IMAC concentrations have been set.

For private water supplies, it is desirable to ascertain the levels of all health-related parameters when a new water supply is brought into use.

Monitoring of non-health related parameters

• Provide information that will assist in implementing the appropriate treatment
• Some of these parameters may be used as indicators of water quality
• Aid in determining suitability of new water sources

Domestic water quality

Water required for household use is called domestic water
• Municipal water treatment plants are designed to supply homes with a domestic water quality that meets drinking water quality guidelines
• Rural users often have two sources in the house, one for drinking (usually with extensive treatment), and non-potable water for other household needs

What is in water?

• In nature all water contains impurities
• As water moves it dissolves and carries with it the things it contacts
• These may be minerals, man-made chemicals and microorganisms
• At certain levels all of these may be considered contaminants
Contaminants

- A contaminant is considered any physical, chemical, biological, or radio-logical substance or matter that has an adverse effect on air, water, or soil.
- Contamination is the introduction into water of microorganisms, chemicals, toxic substances, wastes, or wastewater in a concentration that makes the water unfit for its next intended use.
- A contaminant in drinking water may make it unpalatable or even unsafe.

Sources of contamination

- Erosion of natural rock and soil formation
- Landfills
- Sewage
- Waste water treatment facilities
- Discharges from industrial processes
- Farmland
- Homes and yards

Categories of contaminants

- Microorganisms
- Radio-nuclides
- Inorganics
- Organics
- Disinfectants
- Disinfection by-products

Effects of contaminants in water

- **Aesthetic** - unappealing taste or odour and staining
- **Cosmetic** - unappealing effects of ones appearance
- **Acute health effects** - occur within hours or days of the time that the person consumes a contaminant.
- **Chronic health effects** - occur after people consume a contaminant for many years

Microorganisms

Not all microorganisms present in water will result in ill health effects. Those that do will likely cause acute health effects.

- Protozoan parasites
- Algae
- Bacteria
- Virus

Protozoan parasites

*Cryptosporidium* is a parasite that enters lakes and rivers through sewage and animal waste. It causes cryptosporidiosis, a mild gastrointestinal disease. However, the disease can be severe or fatal for people with severely weakened immune systems.

*Giardia lamblia* is a parasite that enters lakes and rivers through sewage and animal waste. It causes gastrointestinal illness more commonly known as beaver fever (e.g. diarrhea, vomiting, cramps).
**Algae**

Excess algae growth can impart taste and odour problems to potable water

**Blue-green algae toxins** are the naturally produced poisons stored in the cells of certain species of blue-green algae (Anabaena, Aphanizomenon and Microcystis). These toxins fall into various categories. Some are known to attack the liver (hepatotoxins) or the nervous system (neurotoxins); others simply irritate the skin.

**Bacteria**

- Most often cause gastroenteritis.
- Some disease causing bacteria are found naturally in water. These are often referred to as opportunistic pathogens.
- Other disease causing bacteria are found primarily in human and animal fecal waste.

**Some illnesses caused by water borne bacterial pathogens.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bacterial pathogen</th>
<th>Illnesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Campylobacter jejuni</em></td>
<td>Gastroenteritis, meningitis, associated with reactive arthritis and Guillain-Barre paralysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Escherichia coli (several species)</em></td>
<td>Gastroenteritis, hemolytic uremic syndrome (kidney failure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Legionella species</em></td>
<td>Legionnaires Disease, Pontiac Fever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Salmonella species</em></td>
<td>Gastroenteritis, septicemia, anorexia, arthritis, cholecystitis, meningitis, pericarditis, pneumonia, typhoid fever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Shigella species</em></td>
<td>Gastroenteritis, dysentery, hemolytic uremic syndrome, convulsions in young children, associated with Reiters Disease (reactive arthropathy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Vibrio cholerae</em></td>
<td>Cholera (dehydration and kidney failure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Yersinia entercolitica</em></td>
<td>Gastroenteritis, acute mesenteric lymphadenitis, joint pain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Virus**

- Common sources of contamination is from human and animal fecal waste
- Low numbers multiply within the body to cause disease
- Most common health effect is gastrointestinal illness
Some illnesses caused by waterborne viral pathogens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enteric virus</th>
<th>Illnesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Astrovirus, Norwalk virus and other calciviruses, Rotavirus</td>
<td>Gastroenteritis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coxsackievirus A</td>
<td>Meningitis, fever, respiratory disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coxsackievirus B</td>
<td>Myocarditis, congenital heart disease, rash, fever, meningitis, encephalitis, pleurodynia, diabetes mellitus, eye infections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echovirus</td>
<td>Meningitis, encephalitis, rash fever, gastroenteritis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enteric Adenovirus</td>
<td>Respiratory disease, eye infections, gastroenteritis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RHepatitis A and Hepatitis E virus</td>
<td>Hepatitis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poliovirus</td>
<td>Paralysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Radio-nuclides
- Certain minerals are radioactive and may emit alpha or beta radiation as well as photons
- Contamination of water with radio-nuclides results from decay and erosion of natural and man-made deposits
- Consuming water over many years which contain radionuclide may have an increased risk of getting cancer.
- Uranium has been linked to kidney problems

Inorganics
Inorganic substances are mineral in origin. Contamination from inorganic compounds may occur from:
- Erosion of naturally occurring deposits
- Corrosion of pipes and plumbing
- Industrial wastes
- Sewage
- Landfill
Health Effects and some common source contamination of some inorganic chemicals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chemical</th>
<th>Potential Health Effects</th>
<th>Sources of contamination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arsenic</td>
<td>Skin damage; circulatory system problems; increased risk of cancer</td>
<td>Erosion of natural deposits; runoff from orchards; runoff from glass and electronic production wastes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cadmium</td>
<td>Kidney damage</td>
<td>Corrosion of galvanized pipes; erosion of natural deposits; discharge from metal refineries; runoff from waste batteries and paints.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copper</td>
<td>Gastrointestinal distress; liver and kidney damage</td>
<td>Corrosion of household plumbing; erosion of natural deposits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead</td>
<td>Delays in physical or mental development of children; kidney problems; high blood pressure</td>
<td>Corrosion of household plumbing; erosion of natural deposits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercury</td>
<td>Kidney damage</td>
<td>Erosion of natural deposits; discharge from refineries and factories; runoff from landfills and croplands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nitrates</td>
<td>Blue-baby syndrome. Competes for oxygen binding.</td>
<td>Runoff from fertilizer use, sewage; erosion of natural deposits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selenium</td>
<td>Hair or fingernail loss; numbness of fingers or toes; circulatory problems</td>
<td>Discharge from petroleum refineries; erosion of natural deposits; discharge from mines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Organics**

A term used to refer to chemical compounds made from carbon molecules. These compounds may be natural materials (such as animal or plant sources) or man-made materials (such as synthetic organics). Most common sources of organics which have potential health effects are:

- Herbicides and insecticides
- Waste from industrial processes
- Runoff/leaching from landfill
### Health Effects and some common source contamination of some organic compounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organic</th>
<th>Potential Health Effects</th>
<th>Sources of contamination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atrazine</td>
<td>Cardiovascular system or reproductive problems</td>
<td>Runoff from herbicide used on row crops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,4-D</td>
<td>Kidney, liver, or adrenal problems</td>
<td>Runoff from herbicide used on row crops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glyphosate</td>
<td>Kidney problems: reproductive difficulties</td>
<td>Runoff from herbicide use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindane</td>
<td>Liver or kidney problems</td>
<td>Runoff/leaching from insecticide used on cattle, lumber and gardens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methoxychlor</td>
<td>Reproductive difficulties</td>
<td>Runoff/leaching from insecticide used on fruits, vegetables, alfalfa and livestock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benzo(a)pyrene (PAHs)</td>
<td>Reproductive difficulties; increased risk of cancer</td>
<td>Leaching from linings of water storage tanks and distribution lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dioxin</td>
<td>Reproductive difficulties; increased risk of cancer</td>
<td>Emissions from waste incineration and other combustion: discharge from chemical factories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB’s)</td>
<td>Skin changes; thymus gland problems; immune deficiencies; reproductive or nervous system difficulties; increased risk of cancer</td>
<td>Runoff from landfills; discharge of waste chemicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinyl chloride</td>
<td>Increased risk of cancer</td>
<td>leaching from PVC pipes; discharge from plastic factories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xylenes</td>
<td>Nervous system damage</td>
<td>Discharge from petroleum factories; discharge from chemical factories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Disinfectants

- Disinfectants are water additives used to control microbes.
- Chlorine, chloramines and chlorine dioxide
- Potential health effects include: eye/nose irritation; stomach discomfort; anemia

### Disinfection by-products

- Disinfection byproducts form when disinfectants added to drinking water to kill microbes react with naturally-occurring organic matter in water.
- Bromate; chlorite; haloacetic acids (HAAs); trihalomethanes (THMs)
- Increased risk of cancer; anemia; liver, kidney or central nervous system problems
Common problems in surface water sources

• Disease causing microorganisms
• High levels of dissolved nutrients and organic material
• Blue-green algae blooms

Common problems in ground water sources

• High levels of inorganic material such as iron, manganese, hardness, sodium, arsenic, and sulphates
• Some shallow wells have unique problems the most common being nitrates.

Water Treatment

Because of microbial and chemical problems in surface and ground water, most water sources cannot be consumed without treatment. Some commonly used treatments are:

• Filtration
• Coagulation
• Oxidation
• Sedimentation
• Disinfection
• Distillation

Filtration

• A process for removing particulate matter from water by passage through porous media.
• Slow sand filtration - the passage of raw water through a bed of sand at low velocity resulting in substantial particulate removal by physical and biological mechanisms
• Granular activated carbon (GAC) filtration - Adsorptive particles or granules of carbon usually have a high capacity to selectively remove certain trace and soluble materials from water. GAC may be colonized by bacteria which may also remove trace and soluble materials by biological mechanisms (BAC)
• Reverse osmosis and other membranes - allows the passage of the water but not the dissolved solids, the liquid produced is a demineralized water.
• Coagulation - The clumping together of very fine particles into larger particles caused by the use of chemicals (coagulants). The chemicals neutralize the electrical charges of the fine particles and cause destabilization of the particles. Often the first step in surface water treatment. Common coagulants are salts of aluminum and iron.

Oxidation

• Oxidation is the addition of oxygen, removal of hydrogen, or the removal of electrons from an element or compound.
• Oxidation can be effective in converting Fe 2+ and Mn2+ (water soluble forms) to Fe 3+ and Mn 3+ and Mn 4+
• Air, chlorine, potassium permanganate and ozone may be used as oxidants

Sedimentation

A process in which solid particles settle out of the water being treated in a large clarifier or sedimentation basin. Settling time of some particles through 1 m of water:

• Gravel - 1 second
• Fine sand - 2 minutes
• Clay, algae and parasites - 2 hours
• Bacteria - 8 days
• Colloids, virus - 2 to 200 years
Disinfection

- A process designed to kill most microorganisms in water, including essentially all pathogenic (disease-causing) bacteria.
- Chlorine is the most common disinfectant
- Others include chloramines, ozone and ultra violet radiation
- Many virus are resistant to disinfection

Distillation

Distillation is simply the process of heating water to its boiling point, capturing and then condensing the pure steam to form pure distilled water.
- Removes contaminants
- Boiling of the water results in disinfection

Responsibility and stewardship

As users and consumers of water we all must take responsibility in protecting our water supplies. Prevention of contamination is better than a cure for illness