

Safe Drinking Water

This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

People use water every day for drinking, recreation, agriculture, and industry. In the year 2000, the United States alone used 408 billion gallons of water daily! That's the equivalent of almost 1400 gallons of water for every man, woman, and child or enough to fill 14 standard-size bathtubs! This amount includes both direct use, such as drinking, bathing, and flushing the toilet, as well as indirect use, such as watering the lawn, washing the car, and commercial and industrial use.

The drinking water supplies in the United States are among the safest in the world. However, even in the U.S., drinking water can become contaminated and cause health problems, such as gastrointestinal illness, reproductive problems, and neurological disorders. There are many sources of water contamination, including naturally occurring chemicals and minerals, such as arsenic, radon, and uranium. Other sources of contamination include local land use practices, such as fertilizers and pesticides; manufacturing processes; sewer overflow; and malfunctioning septic tanks.

Water treatment plays an important role in public drinking water systems. 2008 marks the 100th anniversary of one of the most important public health advances in our country's history—the chlorination of drinking water in the United States. Today, chlorination is the most common method of disinfecting drinking water. Almost all municipal systems that chemically disinfect drinking water use some form of chlorine, either alone, or in combination with other methods. If you use municipal water, your local water utility will have a Consumer Confidence Report that provides information about the water you're drinking. You can request this report from your local water utility company or online at the Environmental Protection Agency website, at www.epa.gov.

After 100 years of routine public drinking water chlorination, disinfection remains a cornerstone of modern drinking water treatment. New challenges, such as the emergence of chlorine-resistant germs, chemical contamination of water sources, and aging water pipes, will require us to continue to protect our water supply. Investment in our water systems, research, and improvements in water safety regulations will ensure that communities have access to safe drinking water in the future.

For more information about public drinking water quality, visit the EPA water website at www.epa.gov/ow and the CDC healthy water website at www.cdc.gov/healthywater.

For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.