

Arsenic in Well Water: The Problem You Can't See, Smell, or Taste



It's hard to believe that water that looks, smells, and tastes fine may not be safe to drink. But the truth is one in every ten wells in Maine have water that is high in arsenic.

Arsenic is a naturally occurring chemical found in soil and rocks. Some rocks have higher levels of arsenic, and this may explain why some drilled wells have high arsenic water. Wells high in arsenic are found all over Maine. The Maine Center for Disease Control recommends that all household wells in Maine be tested for arsenic.

The Harm Caused by Arsenic

People who drink water high in arsenic for many years are more likely to get cancer. Drinking water very high in arsenic can also cause stomach pain, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, numbness or tingling in the hands and feet, changes in skin, as well as effects on blood and the heart. Arsenic may also harm the growing brain of a baby and young children. How likely you are to get cancer or any other health effects from arsenic in water depend on three major factors:

- How much arsenic is in your water;
- How much water you drink;
- How long you have been drinking the water.

If you think you may have health problems from arsenic in your well water, you should talk with your doctor.

Answers to Some Commonly Asked Questions

Q. How much is too much arsenic in well water?



Answer: Test results for arsenic in water are most often reported as the number of micrograms in a liter of water (ug/L for short). A liter is about a quart. Water with more 10 micrograms of arsenic in a liter (10 ug/L) of water has too much arsenic. Some laboratories report water test results in units of milligrams of arsenic per liter of water (mg/L for short). The limit for arsenic in units of milligrams per liter is 0.01 mg/L.

Q. I just found out I have high arsenic water. What should I do?



Answer: If your water has more than 10 ug/L arsenic, we recommend you begin taking steps to reduce how much of this water you drink. Switching to bottled water for drinking and making beverages will greatly reduce how much arsenic gets into your body. It will also allow you to safely take your time in deciding whether to buy and install a treatment system to remove arsenic from your well water. Sometimes, just using bottled water for drinking and making beverages is all that is needed.

Q. Is there a way to remove arsenic from well water?



Answer: Yes. We advise consulting two or more water treatment companies to help in selecting an arsenic removal system. The choice of a treatment system depends on what else is in your water and how much water you need to treat. While we do not recommend any specific treatment system, we do advise selection of treatment systems that have been certified for arsenic removal by NSF International (www.nsf.org). Also, be sure to test at least once a year after any system is installed to make sure it is working.

Q. Can I use my water for cooking if it is high in arsenic?



Answer: Reducing use of high arsenic water in cooking is the second best way to prevent arsenic from getting into your body – limiting use

for direct drinking and making beverages is first. Rice, pasta, oatmeal and dried beans are examples of foods that absorb a lot of water when cooked. Soup and jello are examples of foods that use water by recipe. You want to avoid using high arsenic water in preparing these types of food. Steaming vegetables is ok, because the arsenic will not be in the steam. Washing vegetables and fruits is ok.

Q. What about using high arsenic water for bathing or brushing teeth?



Answer: We have found that for families who only use treated water for drinking and cooking, arsenic levels in the bodies of both children and adults

remained low even when arsenic levels in untreated water were as high as 100 ug/L. This means that all other uses of water (bathing, brushing teeth) did not result in much arsenic getting into their bodies. If you have water above 100 ug/L, call us toll-free at 866-292-3474 to discuss what type of treatment system might be best for your family.

How do I get more⁴ information about arsenic in well water and what else to test for?

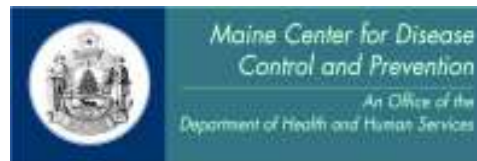
➤ **For more information, contact:**

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Website:

<http://Wellwater.Maine.Gov>

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John E. Baldacci, Governor Brenda M. Harvey, Commissioner

*Caring..Responsive..Well-Managed.
We are DHHS.*

Have You Tested Your Well for Arsenic?

**Protect your family.
Test your well.**



Learn more about:

- **How much is too much arsenic in well water**
- **What to do if you have too much arsenic in your water**
- **When you can use high arsenic water for cooking or bathing**



John E. Baldacci, Governor Brenda M. Harvey, Commissioner