

City of San Diego Water Department - Chlorination Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Is the water safe to drink, even for those with medical problems?

A: The water is safe to drink. Even though the taste of chlorine is more noticeable, it is well within the limits established by State and Federal water quality regulations. People with special medical needs (such as immune deficiencies, organ transplant, chemotherapy patients, and pregnant women) may want to consult their health provider to determine if any precautions need to be taken.

Q. How does chlorine/chloramines affect kidney dialysis patients?

A: Although it is safe for dialysis patients to drink water containing chlorine/chloramines, it is not safe to have it directly enter their bloodstream. In the dialysis process, water comes in contact with the blood across a permeable membrane. Chlorine/chloramines are toxic in dialysis water. Chlorine and chloramines must be removed from the water used in kidney dialysis machines. Medical centers that perform dialysis are responsible for purifying the water that enters the dialysis machines. Hemodialysis patients who receive treatment at home should check with their physicians for the appropriate type of water treatment.

Q. How do chlorine/chloramines affect pregnant women?

Some studies have suggested possible short-term and long-term adverse health effects associated with disinfection by-products (DBPs), especially one group of by-products known as total trihalomethanes (TTHMs). Moreover, a few recent studies indicate possible short-term effects include low birth weight and miscarriages. Yet, other studies found no such linkages or results were inconclusive. Long-term studies also have connected TTHMs to adverse health effects such as cancer. Scientists continue to study TTHMs to provide a clearer understanding of the risks involved.

The San Diego Water Department encourages women who are pregnant or think they may become pregnant to consult their physicians. For more information about water quality and your drinking water, contact our Water Quality Lab at (619) 668-3232 or visit us online at www.sandiego.gov/water. The Water Department will continue to keep customers informed about the results of any future studies. The Water Department also will continue to diligently track and implement new regulations as they go into effect.

Q. How long will this change be in effect?

A: This temporary disinfection change will be in effect from December 22, 2005 – January 19, 2006.

Q. How will this change in disinfectant affect my home water treatment device?

A: There should be no significant impact to your home water treatment device. However, if you still have concerns, we suggest you contact your manufacturer for specific instructions regarding a free chlorine level of 2.5 to 3.0 ppm.

Q. Does the disinfection change affect water quality?

A: No, the drinking water still meets all State and Federal water quality standards.

Q. Why does my water taste/smell different?

A: Your water may taste or smell different because the City of San Diego Water Department is temporarily changing its disinfection. From December 22, 2005 – January 19, 2006, there will be a change from chloramines (a combination of chlorine and ammonia) to chlorine only. Water systems using chloramines must periodically change to chlorine in order to maintain water quality within the water distribution system. During this temporary change to chlorine, you may notice a slight difference in the taste or smell of your tap water.

Q. What can I do to improve the taste/smell?

A: We suggest storing water in an open pitcher and placing it in your refrigerator. The chlorine will naturally dissipate from the water, and will become less noticeable. Also, colder water tastes better.

Q. Why are you doing this during this time of the year?

A: As part of our commitment to provide safe and reliable water, we always monitor the water to determine when the system might need a treatment change. We chose this time of year to allow us to operate using only water treated in the City's water treatment plants. This allows us to avoid mixing imported treated water containing chloramines with our locally treated water containing chlorine.

Q. What are the methods for removing chlorine/chloramines from fish aquariums?

A: Just as with chlorine, chloramines can harm all saltwater and freshwater fish, reptiles, shellfish, and amphibians that live in water, because they take chloramines directly into their bloodstream through their gills. Commercial establishments and hobbyists involved in fish rearing need to take precautions to prevent losses. There are two methods that can be used to remove or neutralize chloramines before adding water to a fish tank, pond, or aquarium: (1) Granular Activated Carbon (GAC) filtration system specifically designed to remove chloramines, or (2) conditioner or additive that contains a dechlorinating chemical for both ammonia and chlorine. These products are available at local pet and aquarium supply stores. The residential and commercial fish owners are advised to verify which method is best for them with their pet store or aquatic/aquarium retailer.

Links to Other Related Information

Environmental Protection Agency Website on Chloramines

<http://www.epa.gov/region09/water/chloramine.html>