



NEW YORK STATE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Concerns About Surface Water as a Drinking Water Source



The New York State Department of Health wants to remind people that there are risks from using water from any surface water source as drinking water, unless that water is properly filtered and disinfected. Water from rivers, lakes, ponds and streams can contain bacteria, parasites, viruses and possibly other contaminants. To make surface water fit to drink, treatment is required.

Remember, we use our drinking water in many different ways. We use it as a beverage, but also make ice cubes, mix baby formula, wash fruits and vegetables, and brush our teeth. If the water is contaminated, this may put you at risk. Depending on the kind of contamination, it may also be a concern to wash dishes, wash hands, shower or bathe.

Public water systems are required to treat, disinfect and monitor water quality for their customers. A public water treatment system is well designed and employs trained technicians to test and maintain water quality. If you are not on a public water system and use surface water as your water supply source, please contact your local health department* for advice. They can talk to you about developing another source of drinking water in your area. If there are no other choices, then they can discuss the treatment options for your surface water source. In the meantime, avoid the use of surface water for your drinking water needs. You should use bottled water or disinfect small batches of water by bringing it to a rolling boil for one – two minutes.

Although the New York State Health Department cannot recommend specific treatment systems or businesses that install them, we would be glad to talk to you about options. For general questions regarding drinking water, call 1-800-458-1158, extension 27650.

Fact Sheet

*You can find the number for the local health department in your phone book, or call the toll-free number listed above for help in locating the office nearest to you.