

Drinking Water and Your Health

Water agencies are required to use the following language to discuss the sources and types of contaminants found in drinking water:

DRINKING WATER, INCLUDING BOTTLED WATER, MAY REASONABLY BE expected to contain at least small amounts of some contaminants. The presence of contaminants does not necessarily indicate that the water poses a health risk. More information about contaminants and potential health effects can be obtained by calling the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (USEPA) Safe Drinking Water Hotline at (800) 426-4791 or visiting their Web site at www.epa.gov/safewater/.

The sources of drinking water (both tap water and bottled water) include rivers, lakes, streams, ponds, reservoirs, springs, and wells. As water travels over the surface of the land or through the ground, it dissolves naturally-occurring minerals and, in some cases, radioactive materials, and can pick up substances resulting from the presence of animals or from human activities.

Contaminants that may be present in source water include:

Microbial contaminants, such as viruses, bacteria and protozoa that may come from sewage treatment plant discharges, septic systems, agricultural livestock operations, and wildlife

Inorganic contaminants, such as salts and metals, that can be naturally-occurring or come from urban stormwater runoff, industrial or domestic wastewater discharges, oil and gas production, mining, or farming

Pesticides and herbicides that may come from a variety of sources such as agriculture, urban stormwater runoff, and residential uses

Organic chemical contaminants, including synthetic and volatile organic chemicals that are by-products of industrial processes and petroleum production, and can also come from gas stations, urban stormwater runoff, agricultural application, and septic systems

Radioactive contaminants, which can be naturally-occurring or be the result of oil and gas production and mining activities

In order to ensure that tap water is safe to drink, USEPA and the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) prescribe regulations that limit the amounts of certain contaminants in water provided by public water systems. CDPH regulations also establish limits for contaminants in bottled water that provide the same protection for public health.

