

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

TEMPORARY CHANGE IN DRINKING WATER DISINFECTION



February 20 – May 15, 2023



What is the temporary switch in water disinfection?

For most of the year, chloramine is used for drinking water disinfection. During a short period each year, disinfection switches to chlorine. This change is part of an annual program to clean water pipes. It's a common water treatment practice for water systems that normally use chloramine throughout the year.



When will the temporary switch in disinfection occur?

The temporary switch to chlorine disinfection will occur February 20 – May 15, 2023. The switch occurs most years, with a duration that varies.



Will chlorine levels be regularly tested during this period?

DC Water routinely collects and tests water samples to monitor for chloramine and chlorine levels throughout the city. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulates the safe use of chlorine and chloramine. For information on test results, visit dcwater.com/waterquality



Will I notice changes in the taste or smell of my water?

During the temporary switch, you may notice a stronger chlorine taste and smell in your drinking water because the disinfectant is cleaning the pipe system. The taste and odor are not a health risk. Chlorine levels continue to meet EPA's safety standards.



What can I do if I notice a chlorine taste or smell?

- Run the cold water tap for two minutes. Run it for five to 10 minutes when water is not used for several hours.
- Refrigerate cold tap water in an open pitcher. Within a few hours, the chlorine taste and odor will disappear.
- Some filters may reduce the chlorine taste and smell.*



Who should take precautions during the temporary switch?

Dialysis centers, medical facilities and aquatic pet owners should take precautions during the temporary switch to chlorine. Most methods for removing chloramine from tap water are effective for removing chlorine. For questions, please contact your physician or kidney dialysis center.



Can I use tap water treated with chlorine/chloramine in an aquarium?

No. Water treated with chlorine and chloramine can be harmful to fish. Chemical additives are available for removing these disinfectants from water used in fish tanks or ponds. Contact your local pet store for the appropriate water treatment for fish tanks.



Who is responsible for the temporary switch?

The Washington Aqueduct is responsible for treating drinking water in the District and parts of Northern Virginia. The Aqueduct switches disinfection from chloramine to chlorine at the request of DC Water, Fairfax Water, and Arlington County for an annual cleaning of their systems.

*DC Water recommends using devices that are installed at your faucet tap or pitcher-style filters. Use a filter certified to meet NSF standards and replace the filter as recommended by the manufacturer.



What are drinking water disinfectants?

Chlorine and chloramine are common disinfectants used to remove microbial contaminants (like bacteria and viruses) from water systems. Disinfection occurs during the drinking water treatment process.



What are disinfection byproducts?

Disinfection byproducts form when chlorine and other disinfectants react with natural organic material. Chlorine produces higher levels of disinfection byproducts than chloramine. Exposure to high levels of disinfection byproducts over many years has been associated with potential health risks, such as cancer. As a result, the EPA regulates two groups of disinfection byproducts linked to these health risks, known as trihalomethanes and haloacetic acids. DC Water conducts routine testing of disinfection byproduct levels to ensure that the District's levels are below limits set by the EPA. For information on test results, visit dcwater.com/waterquality



What is the process for disinfection?

During the treatment process, the Washington Aqueduct disinfects the drinking water in two phases, primary and secondary disinfection. Typically, the District's drinking water is treated with chlorine for primary disinfection and chloramine for secondary disinfection. For a short period each year, the Washington Aqueduct temporarily switches the second phase of disinfection to chlorine and does not use chloramine.



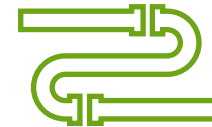
Will disinfection byproducts increase?

Disinfection byproducts can increase due to chlorine disinfection. However, we implement this change in the cooler months to lessen the formation of these byproducts. DC Water routinely tests for disinfection byproducts to ensure that levels meet EPA limits and DC Water target levels.



What is chloramine?

Chloramine is a water disinfectant that is formed when ammonia is added in combination with chlorine. It provides long-lasting protection as water travels from the treatment plant to your tap and is very effective in large distribution systems, such as the District's. Chloramine is used most of the year to reduce levels of potentially harmful byproducts of water disinfection, known as disinfection byproducts.



Will water disinfectants affect household plumbing or water heaters?

Some household pipes and water heaters may have rubber parts, which can degrade over time. Chlorine-resistant parts are available at hardware stores or from your plumber.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

DC Water – Drinking Water Division
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24-Hour Emergency Command Center
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