

Temporary Change in Drinking Water Disinfection Frequently Asked Questions

What is the temporary, annual switch in water disinfection?

During the majority of the year, chloramine is used for drinking water disinfection in Arlington. For a short period each year, disinfection switches from chloramine to chlorine. This change is part of an annual program to clean water pipes in Arlington and maintain water quality throughout the year. A temporary change to chlorine is a standard water treatment practice for water systems that use chloramine during the majority of the year.

When is this switch scheduled?

The temporary switch to chlorine will occur March 21 through May 2, 2011. This year's temporary switch is shorter in duration than in 2010.

Will chlorine levels be regularly tested during this period?

Arlington routinely collects and tests water samples to monitor for chloramine and chlorine levels throughout the water system. EPA regulates the safe use of chlorine and chloramine.

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

During the temporary switch, you may notice a chlorine taste and smell in your drinking water. Chlorine levels will continue to meet EPA standards and are not a health risk.

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

Arlington recommends a few steps:

- Run the cold water tap for five minutes or so when water is not used for several hours.
- Collect and refrigerate cold tap water in an open pitcher. Be sure to collect water after running the cold water tap for two minutes. Within a few hours, the chlorine taste and odor will disappear and the water will be conveniently cold for drinking.
- Water filters can reduce chlorine taste and smell. Be sure to use a filter certified to meet National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) standards and replace the filter cartridge as recommended by the manufacturer.

Who should take special precautions during the temporary switch in disinfection?

Customers who normally take special precautions to remove chloramine from tap water, such as dialysis centers, medical facilities and aquatic pet owners, should continue to take the same precautions during the temporary switch to chlorine. Most methods for removing chloramine from tap water are effective in removing chlorine. For additional questions, please contact your physician or kidney dialysis center.

Can I use tap water treated with chlorine or chloramine in my fish 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 in water disinfection?

The Washington Aqueduct is responsible for treating drinking water for Arlington and will switch disinfection from chloramine to chlorine at the request of DC Water, Falls Church, and Arlington County to enhance their water quality management programs.

What are drinking water disinfectants?

Chlorine and chloramine are common disinfectants used for killing potential bacteria in water systems and are added during the drinking water treatment process.

What is the process for drinking water disinfection?

During the treatment process, the Washington Aqueduct disinfects the drinking water in two phases, primary and secondary disinfection. Typically, Arlington'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.

What is chloramine?

Chloramine is a water disinfectant formed when ammonia is added to 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 Arlington's. Chloramine is used most of the year to lower levels of potentially harmful byproducts of water disinfection, known as disinfection byproducts (DBPs).

What are disinfection byproducts?

Disinfection byproducts (DBPs) form when chlorine and other disinfectants react with natural material found in the Potomac River. Chlorine produces higher levels of DPBs than chloramine. Exposure to high levels of DBPs over many years has been associated with potential health risks, such as cancer. As a result, the EPA regulates two groups of DBPs linked to these health risks, known as trihalomethanes and haloacetic acids. In Arlington, DPB levels are below EPA standards and Arlington conducts routine testing.

Will disinfection byproducts increase during the temporary switch in disinfection?

The short-term use of chlorine is important for maintaining high water quality throughout the year, but DBPs will temporarily increase during this period. Although DPB levels may increase, Arlington will monitor water quality to ensure these levels remain below EPA standards.

For additional information, contact the Arlington's Department of Environmental Services at 703-228-6570.

Additional Resources

[Environmental Protection Agency](#)

[American Water Works Association](#)