



Is My Tap Water Safe to Drink?

Residents of New York City and the Hudson Valley who depend on the City's unfiltered drinking water supply want to know whether their tap water is safe to drink. Riverkeeper's Watershed Team has undertaken a multi-year study in order to answer that question. We examined and compared New York City's water quality to the drinking water quality of thirteen other large U.S. cities, including four that also rely on unfiltered water supplies.

Key findings of the study:

- 1. New York City's testing program is robust and comprehensive.** In all four years reviewed, the City tested drinking water for more contaminants than any of the ten largest U.S. cities surveyed.
- 2. Overall drinking water quality in the cities surveyed is very high.**
- 3. Lead contamination, which is caused by lead soldered plumbing in older buildings, remains a concern at the tap.** Over the four-year study period, New York reported the highest average number of samples that exceeded drinking water standards for lead.
- 4. New York City reported extremely low levels of waterborne pathogens in approximately 80% of the water samples tested.** Although the City's testing methods did not allow it to determine whether detected organisms were alive or capable of causing disease, no waterborne disease outbreaks were reported. However, the presence of any potentially disease-causing organisms in drinking water supplies is of concern, particularly to upstate communities that receive water from that part of the Catskill/Delaware system that has not been treated by the City's UV disinfection facility in Westchester County.
- 5. Some of New York City's reservoirs exceeded drinking water limits for turbidity on a number of occasions during the study period.** Turbidity in drinking water supplies can mask the presence of pathogens and inhibit chlorine disinfection. If turbidity is not adequately mitigated in the near future, storm-driven increases in reservoir turbidity could require expensive filtration of the City's drinking water.
- 6. New York City detected pharmaceuticals and personal care products (PPCPs), contaminants of emerging concern, in its water supply.** After confirming the presence of trace concentrations of some PPCPs in 2010, New York discontinued its PPCP testing program in 2011. Virtually all PPCPs are contaminants for which there are no state or federal standards. No long-term studies exist to determine their potential risks to human health, but many have documented adverse effects on aquatic organisms.

Recommendations:

- 1. Resume New York City's PPCP testing program.** We also urge New York State and the federal government to develop regulatory standards for PPCPs in municipal drinking water supplies.
- 2. Require retrofitting of lead-soldered plumbing in households reporting lead exceedances.**
- 3. Maintain and if necessary, enhance source controls to reduce or eliminate waterborne pathogens in upstream and terminal reservoirs.**
- 4. Implement sound turbidity control measures to protect New York City's reservoirs, delivery system and consumers from the risk of pathogens and a potential filtration mandate.**

To read the full report:

http://www.riverkeeper.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/report_noprintermarks-lowres.pdf