



EAST-CENTRAL DISTRICT Health Department

a nebraska *health+* center



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DATE: 10/02/2019

TIME: 10:24 AM

[Columbus, NE] – On Wednesday, September 18th, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) notified the City of Columbus and the East Central District Health Department (ECDHD) that the level of arsenic in the city water supply was out of compliance. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations requires that public water systems maintain an average arsenic level below 10 micrograms per liter ($\mu\text{g/L}$). Over a 12-month period, average arsenic levels reached 11 $\mu\text{g/L}$ during testing in Columbus.

There is not an immediate danger to the public's health. Health effects associated with exposure to arsenic at these levels occur after many years of constant exposure.

Arsenic is a metal that occurs naturally in the environment, and may occur as a by-product of some agricultural or industrial activities. Arsenic can enter the drinking water through the ground as run-off into surface water sources, or can enter the water through naturally occurring arsenic deposits underground in rocks and sediments.

Long-term exposure to this naturally-occurring element can cause cancer over time. In 2001, the federal regulation for arsenic in public-water supplies was lowered from 50 $\mu\text{g/L}$ to 10 $\mu\text{g/L}$. Read more about this change here:

<https://nepis.epa.gov/Exe/ZyPdf.cgi?Dockey=20001XXE.txt>.

Columbus residents should not boil water for drinking. Boiling, freezing, or letting water stand does not reduce the arsenic level. Excessive boiling can make the arsenic more concentrated, because arsenic remains behind when water evaporates. Bottled water is not considered necessary as a result of these arsenic levels.

If you are concerned about the level of arsenic in your well, and are not a City of Columbus water customer, you can purchase water test kits directly through DHHS. These kits cost about \$19 and can be ordered here:

<http://www.nebraska.gov/dhhs/water-test-kits/private.html>. ECDHD does not have arsenic test kits.

For more information about arsenic and drinking water, please see the following resources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/private/wells/disease/arsenic.html>

https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-03/documents/arsenic_toxfags_3v.pdf