

The Local Board of Health Environmental Health Primer Drinking Water Factsheet



ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Background

- The Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974 has resulted in a comprehensive system of federal and state controls governing municipal water supplies, but people might not be aware that no one is protecting their personal water supply.
- Water can have biological, chemical, and physical contaminants. Some contaminants result in acute (or immediate) effects; others present a threat only following chronic (or long-term) exposure.
- Groundwater, which supplies about half the nation's water supply, can become contaminated by pollutants discharging directly into the ground or wastewater contact with the groundwater supply.
- Individuals in rural areas who use local wells (or surface water supplies) have very few protections from contamination.
- Health department programs that protect water supplies typically include assessment of site suitability, specification or approval of well design or location, well remediation and decontamination, well water sampling and analysis, well closure planning, and community and individual education.

Board of Health Actions

- Promote educational events to spread awareness of how individual actions can affect drinking water quality. Include information about how household pesticides or disposing of medicine by flushing it down the toilet can cause drinking water to become contaminated.
- Assure that local health departments meet the needs of the rural areas that do not have protections associated with being part of municipal systems and adopt or recommend rules or regulations to protect private water supplies.
- Contribute to local planning regarding new water systems and watershed protection.
- Ensure that health department takes an active and comprehensive leadership role reflecting the characteristics of the community and its associated needs to guarantee the continual supply of safe drinking water.

Resources for Continuing Education

- American Water Works Association. Available at www.awwa.org
- National Association of Local Boards of Health. (2011). Drinking Water. In *The Local Board of Health Environmental Health Primer* (2nd ed.).
- United States Environmental Protection Agency. Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water. Available at www.epa.gov/safewater

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