



Making a difference...together

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Frequently Asked Questions

What are disinfection by-products (DBPs)?

DBPs are a group of chemical compounds that are made when chlorine reacts with organic matter, such as leaves and plants.

Why is chlorine added to the water?

Chlorine is added to drinking water to kill bacteria and viruses. Chlorination is effective in stopping many waterborne diseases. The immediate risk of illness from drinking untreated water is far greater than the health risks of DBP. Currently the LHBC system is being appropriately operated to balance the safety achieved through chlorination with the concerns arising from the DBPs.

What are the health effects of trihalomethanes and haloacetic acids?

People who are exposed to high levels of trihalomethanes or haloacetic acids may have a slight increase in the risk of bladder cancer. This may occur after exposure to high levels for a long period of time, at least 20 years. Other factors like smoking are more commonly related to the development of bladder cancer even where levels may be increased. Some literature suggests that trihalomethanes and haloacetic acids may be associated with a small increase in the risk of other health problems; however, such findings are not conclusive.

How can I be exposed to DBPs?

People can be exposed to DBPs by drinking water with high levels of DBPs. DBPs can also evaporate from the tap and be breathed in during showering, or can be absorbed through the skin during bathing.

What can I do to reduce my exposure to DBPs?

There are several ways you can lower the DBPs for drinking water at home:

- Allow tap water to sit (covered or exposed) for 24 hours (refrigerated or at room temperature) before consumption. This will allow the DBPs to partially evaporate into the air.
- Use an activated carbon filter, such as a filter pitcher.
- If boiling water is necessary, for cooking or preparing hot drinks, it is recommended that the water is from one of the aforementioned methods (water that has sat for 24 hours or carbon filtration or bottled water), then do so in a well ventilated area.

You can further lower your exposure to DBPs while bathing by:

- Ensuring the bathroom is well-ventilated, such as opening a window or turning the fan on.
- Taking short baths instead of a shower.
- Using colder water to bath or shower.

For more information, visit the Health Canada website at www.canada.ca/en/health-canada.html