

How drinkable is New York City's tap water? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

How bad is the water here in New York City? Do you recommend drinking filtered water, or does it really make a difference?

Thirsty

Answer

Dear Thirsty,

You assume New York City water is bad, but in fact, it's quite good! The NYC Department of Environmental Protection (NYCDEP) rigorously tests the city's tap water and reports their findings to the public annually. (For the official report, visit the [DEP's water quality page](#) ^[2].) By most counts, the quality of NYC's tap water is something to drink to!

In particular, three of the major culprits for drinking water contamination are lead, bacteria, and disinfectants or disinfectant byproducts. New York City stacks up pretty well in terms of each of them.

- New York City's water supplies are virtually lead-free. There is the possibility that lead can leach into water from old plumbing, but sampling indicates that the vast majority of NYC taps produce water containing only minute, insignificant quantities of lead (if any). Those worried that their tap might be among the very few with dangerous lead levels can call 311 for a free testing kit.
- Although the common bacteria *Giardia* and *Cryptosporidium* have been detected in some water samples, there is no evidence that these bugs have caused any illness among New Yorkers. The DEP acknowledges the potential risk of gastrointestinal infection due to these water-borne bacteria, but maintains that this risk is very minor. For details related to the ongoing monitoring of *Giardia* and *Cryptosporidium*, visit [NYCDEP's Waterborne Disease Risk Assessment Program](#) ^[3].
- All NYC drinking water is treated with chlorine (to kill harmful bacteria and viruses), as well as fluoride (to help prevent tooth decay) and orthophosphate (to help prevent metals, including lead, from being released from plumbing). Some studies report that over a period

of decades, exposure to chlorine and its byproducts are associated with an increased risk for certain types of cancer. However, this risk is relatively small compared to those associated with non-chlorinated water.

So, whether or not filtering one's water would be beneficial depends both on how safe the water is to begin with and how effective the filter is at making it safer. Some households require no filtration and others require special filters for specific contaminants. For help selecting an appropriate filter, visit the [NSF International Public Health and Safety Company's Home Water Treatment Devices web page](#) [4].

Alice!

Category:

[General Health](#) [5]

[Body Maintenance](#) [6]

[Environmental Health](#) [7]

Related questions

[Safety in the city... and everywhere else](#) [8]

[Is it possible to drink too much water?](#) [9]

[Tap or bottled water: Which is better for you?](#) [10]

[Recurring flu symptoms, or something else?](#) [11]

[Something in the air: Air pollution and health](#) [12]

Published date:

Oct 01, 1994

Last reviewed on:

Jul 08, 2015

Footer menu

▼ [Contact Alice!](#)

- [Content Use](#)
- [Media Inquiries](#)
- [Comments & Corrections](#)

▼ [Syndication & Licensing](#)

- [Licensing Q&As](#)
- [Get Alice! on Your Website](#)
- [Full Site Syndication](#)
- [Link to Go Ask Alice!](#)

Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/how-drinkable-new-york-city%E2%80%99s-tap-water>

Links

- [1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/how-drinkable-new-york-city%E2%80%99s-tap-water>
- [2] http://www.nyc.gov/html/dep/html/drinking_water/index.shtml
- [3] http://www.nyc.gov/html/dep/html/drinking_water/wdrap.shtml
- [4] http://www.nsf.org/consumer/drinking_water/dw_treatment.asp?program=WaterTre
- [5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/general-health>
- [6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/body-maintenance>
- [7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/environmental-health>
- [8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/safety-city-and-everywhere-else>
- [9] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/it-possible-drink-too-much-water>
- [10] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/tap-or-bottled-water-which-better-you-0>
- [11] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/recurring-flu-symptoms-or-something-else>
- [12] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/something-air-air-pollution-and-health>