



# Uranium in Drinking Water

## What is uranium?

Uranium is a naturally occurring metal found throughout the world. Small amounts can be found in rocks, soil, water, plants, animals and humans. Uranium is weakly radioactive and contributes to low levels of natural radiation in the environment.

## How does uranium get into drinking water?

When ground water dissolves minerals that contain naturally occurring deposits of uranium, it can enter into drinking water. Another way is through human activity such as mining.

## How do people come in contact with uranium?

A person can be exposed to uranium by inhaling dust in the air, or ingesting food or water that contains uranium. The general population is exposed to uranium primarily through food and water. People who live near facilities that mine or process uranium ore may have an increased exposure to uranium.

## What does uranium do once it gets into the body?

About 99 percent of uranium ingested through food and water will leave a person's body in feces, with the remainder entering the bloodstream. Most of this absorbed uranium will be removed by the kidneys and excreted in the urine with a few days. A small amount of the uranium in the bloodstream will deposit in a person's bones, where it will remain for years.

## What is the effect of uranium on our health?

The health effects of uranium in drinking water are mainly from its chemical properties and not from its radiological properties. Heavy metals, like uranium, have the potential to affect the kidneys. The Canadian guideline and the Ontario Drinking Water Objective for uranium in drinking water are both 0.02mg/L (20 ppb).

## How do I know if I have uranium in my drinking water?

To find out if you have uranium in your drinking water you must test for it. You can have your well water tested by a private laboratory.

## What can I do if the uranium in my drinking water is above the Canadian guideline.

- Use an alternate safe supply for drinking
- Treat the drinking water supply (eg. water softener, reverse osmosis, distillation, conventional coagulation, lime softening, activated alumina); see a local water treatment company for information.

### For more information contact:

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