Drinking water with high levels of arsenic over many years can cause health problems. Arsenic is a naturally occurring element found on the earth’s crust. It occurs naturally in the groundwater in New Mexico because the water dissolves it out of volcanic rocks and soil.

What level of arsenic is considered safe in drinking water?
New Mexico has adopted the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) national drinking water standard for arsenic of 10 micrograms per liter (µg/L).

Where do I go to find out about my drinking water?
If you drink water from a private well, you may want to have it tested periodically for levels of arsenic and other metals or contaminants.

If you have a water from a community water supply, contact your community water system to learn about levels and recent testing or the New Mexico Environment Department Drinking Water Bureau at 1-877-654-8720.

What to do if your drinking water has high levels of arsenic?
You can remove the arsenic to a safe level through reverse osmosis units for all water you drink and cook with, including:

- Beverages such as coffee, tea, juices, and ice.
- Food like soup, stew, rice, cereals, pasta, and in items you bake.

Or you can replace it with bottled water.

How can arsenic be removed from the drinking water?
Reverse osmosis units typically remove arsenic from drinking water whereas other types of filtration may not.

If you decide to purchase a reverse osmosis system you may want to consult with National Sanitation Foundation at http://www.nsf.org/ or at toll-free at 1-877-867-3435 to help make a decision of which model to buy.

Will boiling the water remove the arsenic?
No it will not. DO NOT BOIL the water to remove arsenic because boiling the water will raise the level of arsenic in the water.

How else might a person be exposed to arsenic?
Arsenic is commonly found in:

- Commercial products – examples are wood preservatives, insecticides, sheep dip
- Food – examples: wine, tobacco, saltwater fish, seaweed
- Industrial processes – examples: copper, lead, smelting, and wood treatments.
- Some medicines – examples: folk remedies, antiparasitic drugs, some naturopathic remedies.

How does arsenic enter the body?
Arsenic is found virtually everywhere in small amounts so it enters the body when we take in air, water and food. Although, meat, fish and poultry account for most (about 80%) of dietary arsenic, reducing arsenic in your drinking water is one of the most effective ways to reduce the amount that enters your body.
What are the health effects of arsenic in drinking water?
Arsenic in drinking water is absorbed from the gastrointestinal tract (gut) and widely spread within the body. Most of this arsenic can be filtered out through the kidneys and eliminated from body within a few days.

Studies have shown that exposure over many years to high levels of arsenic in drinking water can increase a person’s risk of certain cancers, diabetes, arterial thickening (which leads to hypertension), liver damage, peripheral nervous system damage (such as sensation of pins and needles in hands and feet), peripheral vascular disease, and skin changes.

For health questions you may call the state health department at 1-888-878-8992.

How likely is arsenic to cause cancer?
Several studies have shown that arsenic in drinking water can increase the risk of some cancers such as bladder, lung, skin, kidney, prostate and liver cancers. You can learn more about cancers in New Mexico at nmtracking.unm.edu/health_effects/cancer/.

Can this water be used to take a shower or to bathe in?
Yes, there doesn’t seem to be public health risk from bathing or showering in water with arsenic.

Is arsenic harmful to pets?
Studies have shown that arsenic can cause problems in animals, as well as humans, so it is a good idea to give pets the same filtered water as the rest of your family.

Where can I learn more about arsenic and health effects?

State Health Department
Environmental Public Health Tracking
http://nmtracking.org

Bernalillo County
Office of Environmental Health
http://www.bernco.gov/arsenic-3005

State Environment Department
http://eidea.state.nm.us/SDWIS/

Environmental Protection Agency
http://water.epa.gov/lawsregs/rulesregs/sdwa/arsenic/index.cfm

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

National Institutes of Health MedlinePlus

Occupational Safety and Health Administration