



February 2006



## Nitrates in Drinking Water

### What you need to know and do if your drinking water has too much nitrate

**Who** is at greatest risk?

- ❖ Infants
- ❖ Pregnant Women



**What** to do? Replace tap water with bottled water for:

- Formula
- Juice
- Cereals
- All other drinks and foods made with water



**How long?** Keep using bottled water until the New Mexico Environment Department or the water system says it's safe to use tap water.



**Where** do I go to find out about my drinking water? Contact:

- Your community water system  
or
- The New Mexico Environment Department Drinking Water Bureau at 1-877-654-8720 TOLL FREE or go to <http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/dwb/dwbtop.html>



**Why?** When tests show that public drinking water has too much nitrogen (N), nitrate (NO<sub>3</sub>) or nitrite (NO<sub>2</sub>) a notice may be issued to make sure that people at risk will take the precautions so they won't get sick from drinking it.

**Some** signs and symptoms of health problems due to nitrates:

- Early signs & symptoms: bluish skin, lips, fingers, hands and legs.
- Other symptoms: headache, weakness, rapid pulse, rapid breathing, lethargy, loss of consciousness, heart arrhythmias, shock, convulsions.

**What** if my baby or I get sick because of nitrates in my drinking water?  
Seek medical treatment immediately.

To report health problems from nitrates and for health-related questions, call the New Mexico Department of Health at 1-505-827-0006 or 505-476-1743.  
For more information visit our website at <http://www.health.state.nm.us/>

**Note: DO NOT BOIL the water**

Boiling the water will only raise the level of nitrates and nitrites in the water.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Question** – Who is most at risk for getting sick from high nitrates in drinking water and why?

**Answer** –

- Infants, especially 0-3 months old and premature infants; because infants can develop a life-threatening condition known as “a blue baby syndrome” (or methemoglobinemia).
- Pregnant Women – because of possible connection between high levels of nitrates to miscarriages and birth defects.
- People with genetic deficiency in enzyme changing methemoglobin back to hemoglobin.



**Question** – Where do nitrates come from?

**Answer** – Low levels of nitrates are naturally present in drinking water and they do not cause health problems. The following are some sources that could raise the nitrate to harmful levels if they get into your drinking water: fertilizers and manure, human and animal waste from septic tanks, landfills, explosives, and decaying plants and animals. [For the nitrate levels in your community's drinking water system, go to http://eidea.State.nm.us/SDWIS/](http://eidea.State.nm.us/SDWIS/)



**Question** - Can I use this water to take a shower?

**Answer** – Yes.



**Question** – Should my pets get bottled water too?

**Answer** – Yes, this is a good idea because many pets, especially young animals can be affected the same way as human babies.



**Question** – Is it ok to water my plants with this water?

**Answer** – Yes, it is ok to water your plants with tap water that is high in nitrates or nitrites because many plants use this as a nutrient.



**Question** – I have a tap filter or filtering water pitcher, do I still need to use bottled water?

**Answer** – Yes, for those at risk. Most pitchers that have a water filter do **not** filter out nitrates or nitrites. If you have other filters on your refrigerator, on your faucet, or under your sink, read the package insert to see if the filter removes nitrogen, nitrates and nitrites. If in doubt, use bottled water.



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