

Drinking water - Frequently asked questions

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– Drinking water quality and safety 📄 ↻

Where can I find information on Ottawa’s drinking water quality?

The City prepares an [annual report](#) for each municipal drinking water system, in compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Do I need to filter or boil my water?

You do not need to filter or boil your tap water. Be aware of [door-to-door sales representatives](#) making false claims about the City’s tap water being unsafe.

Ottawa’s drinking water consistently meets all Federal and Provincial standards. The City of Ottawa publishes an [extensive drinking water quality sampling and testing program](#), and City staff will respond promptly to any concerns or inquiries about drinking water quality.

In some cases, the use of a water treatment device might be justified or could improve the aesthetic quality of your tap water:

- If you are served by one of Ottawa’s municipal well systems, you may want to consider an in-home treatment device (such as a water softener) for aesthetic reasons.
- If you have a home with a [lead water service pipe or lead in your internal plumbing](#), you may also want to consider using an in-home filter to remove lead from your tap water.

For more information, please email info-water@ottawa.ca or consult [Health Canada’s resources](#) before purchasing an in-home water system.

What if I am on a private well?

For more information on water quality for residents living on a private well, please consult with [Ottawa Public Health](#).

Is the manufacture and sale of water treatment devices currently regulated in Canada?

The manufacture and sale of water treatment devices for home use is not regulated in Canada. However, the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) in consultation with Health Canada has developed voluntary performance standards for water treatment devices and certification by the NSF is the only guarantee that a device can meet specified performance standards for removal of specific contaminants. For more information visit nsf.org.

Is Ottawa’s drinking water hard or soft?

Water hardness is caused by the presence of calcium and magnesium minerals in water. Ottawa’s water supply is considered very soft due to the natural softness of the source water (Ottawa River). Hard water does not pose any health concerns, however it can lead to scale deposits on hot surfaces such as kettles and hot water tanks.

Ottawa’s central drinking water supply is about 30 mg/L (ppm) of total hardness which is considered very soft. This is equivalent to 2.5 grains per gallon of hardness. In Ottawa’s municipal well systems, hardness levels are much higher due to the presence of calcium and magnesium minerals present in the ground water. Residents may want to install a water softener system to remove hardness minerals for supplies with hardness levels that are moderate or high. It is important to note that sodium levels can be greatly increased after passing through a water softener, which may be a concern for people on sodium restricted diets.

For reference, hardness levels (in mg/L or ppm) are shown below for each of Ottawa’s municipal water systems:

Water system	Hardness
Ottawa central water supply	30 mg/L (very soft)
Carp well system	200 mg/L (moderate hardness)
Kings Park (Richmond) well system	350 mg/L (hard water)
Richmond West Well System	285 mg/L (moderate hardness)
Munster well system	285 mg/L (moderate hardness)
Shadow Ridge (Greely) well system	350 mg/L (hard water)
Vars well system	200 mg/L (moderate hardness)

How are drinking water standards set?

In Canada, drinking water is the jurisdiction of each province. Health Canada, through a Federal/Provincial/Territorial committee, establishes national guidelines and maximum acceptable concentrations for certain substances that might occur in drinking water supplies and could have adverse effects on human health.

When a drinking water guideline is proposed or revised, a public consultation process is carried out before final approval.

In Ontario, the Ministry of Environment, Conservation, and Parks (MECP) reviews the Health Canada drinking water guidelines and either adopts or modifies the guideline as an Ontario Drinking Water Standard. In most cases, the provincial standard is identical to the Health Canada guideline; however, in some cases the Province of Ontario adopts a more stringent standard.

Is the City's Medical Officer of Health satisfied with the quality of Ottawa's drinking water?

Yes. The Medical Officer of Health and Ottawa Public Health routinely review the results of the City’s water quality monitoring program, and work collaboratively with Water Services staff to review any concerns or operational emergencies related to drinking water safety.

In the event of suspected or potential risk to the water supply, a public drinking water advisory would be issued by Ottawa Public Health. In most cases, these measures are carried out on a precautionary basis, and are lifted once the water supply is deemed safe.

What is Ottawa doing to further improve the quality of its drinking water?

The City carries out extensive research studies and experiments to better understand our treatment process and to improve drinking water quality for residents. New methods of water treatment are being evaluated at the City’s Pilot Plant Research Facility, located at the Britannia Water Purification Plant. These studies are completed in collaboration with several Canadian universities and North American research agencies.

How can I get my tap water tested?

If you have concerns about the quality of your tap water, and these cannot be resolved over the phone, you can arrange for onsite testing of your water. Contact the City of Ottawa at 3-1-1 to arrange an appointment. There is no cost for this service.

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Contact us

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