

Frequently Asked Questions

Temporary Disinfectant Switch

1. When is this switch scheduled?

The temporary switch to chlorine will occur March 26, 2018 through May 7, 2018.

2. Is my water safe to drink?

Yes, the drinking water distribution system to the Arlington consumers is safe to drink and meets all Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards.

3. Why do a “chlorine burn”?

The “chlorine burn” typically kills bacteria that may be in the bio-film on the pipe walls. Many experts believe this short exposure to a different type of disinfectant maintains a low microbial growth in the bio-film.

4. What are drinking water disinfectants?

Chlorine and chloramine are common disinfectants used for killing potential bacteria in water systems and added at the drinking water treatment plant.

5. What will I notice during this period?

You may notice a chlorine taste and odor in your drinking water while free chlorine is utilized. If you are especially sensitive to the taste and odor of chlorine, we recommend running your cold water taps for 5 – 10 minutes before using it, or keeping an open pitcher of drinking water in your refrigerator. This will enable the chlorine to dissipate, thus reducing the chlorine taste. Remember, drinking water has a shelf life! Change out the water in your refrigerated container weekly.

Additionally, Arlington County crews will be flushing fire hydrants throughout the system. Flushing may result in temporary discoloration and the presence of sediment in your water. These conditions are not harmful and should be of very short duration.

6. What can I do if I notice any changes in the taste, smell, or appearance of my water?

If your water is discolored, run the cold water tap until the water is clear (typically 10 mins is sufficient). In the unlikely event that the water remains discolored or cloudy, contact Arlington County: 703-228-6570 (Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.) or 703-228-6555 (24-hour).

7. Who should take special precautions during the temporary switch in disinfection?

Customers who normally take special precautions to remove chloramine from tap water, such as dialysis centers, medical facilities and aquatic pet owners, should continue to take the same precautions during the temporary switch to chlorine. Most methods for

removing chloramine from tap water are effective in removing chlorine. For additional questions, please contact your physician or kidney dialysis center.

8. Why is the disinfection treatment process temporarily switching to chlorine?

A temporary change in drinking water disinfection is an annual program to clean the water distribution pipes and maintain high water quality throughout the year. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Washington Aqueduct is responsible for treating Arlington's drinking water and will switch from chloramine to chlorine during this period.

During the treatment process, the Washington Aqueduct disinfects the drinking water in two phases, primary and secondary disinfection. Typically, Arlington's drinking water is treated with both chlorine and chloramine. Chloramine is the secondary disinfectant that is used most of the year and limits the exposure to disinfection byproducts associated with chlorine.

For a short period, each year, the Washington Aqueduct temporarily switches both phases of disinfection to chlorine and does not use chloramine. This temporary switch to chlorine is a standard water treatment practice.

9. What is chloramine?

Chloramine is a water disinfectant that is formed when ammonia is added in combination with chlorine. It provides long-lasting protection as water travels from the treatment plant to your tap and is very effective in large distribution systems, such as the District's. Chloramine is used most of the year to reduce levels of potentially harmful byproducts of water disinfection, known as disinfection byproducts (DBPs).

10. Will chlorine levels be regularly tested during this period?

Yes, Arlington County routinely collects and analyzes samples throughout the city to ensure chlorine levels meet a stringent target level and federal drinking water standards.

11. What is the process for drinking water disinfection?

During the treatment process, the Washington Aqueduct disinfects the drinking water in two phases, primary and secondary disinfection. Typically, the drinking water is treated with chlorine for primary disinfection and chloramine for secondary disinfection. For a short period, each year, the Washington Aqueduct temporarily switches the second phase of disinfection to chlorine and does not use chloramine.

12. What are disinfection byproducts?

Disinfection byproducts (DBPs) form when chlorine and other disinfectants react with natural material found in the Potomac River and may be associated with reproductive health and other long-term health effects. As a result, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) enforces regulatory limits for two groups of DBPs linked to health risks, known as trihalomethanes (THMs) and haloacetic acids (HAAs).

In 2000, the Washington Aqueduct switched from the use of chlorine to chloramine for secondary disinfection to reduce DBP levels and comply with EPA's strict standards. This treatment change resulted in a significant decline in regulated DBP concentrations. Arlington County conducts routine testing of DBP levels to ensure that Arlington's levels are below limits set by the EPA.

13. Will disinfection byproducts increase during this period?

The short-term use of chlorine is important for maintaining high water quality throughout the year, but will temporarily increase DBPs during this period. Despite this temporary increase, Arlington County will routinely monitor water quality to ensure disinfection byproduct levels remain below federal drinking water standards.

14. Can I use tap water treated with chlorine or chloramine in my fish aquarium?

No, water treated with chlorine and chloramine can be harmful to fish. Chemical additives are available for removing these disinfectants from water used in fish tanks or ponds. Contact your local pet store for the appropriate water treatment for fish tanks.

15. How is Arlington County notifying the public about this switch?

Arlington County released a joint media alert prior to the temporary switch in disinfection. Customers can also find more information from Arlington County: 703-228-6570 (Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.) or 703-228-6555 (24-hour) or on the web at www.arlingtonva.us.

16. What is next?

Our water disinfection is a continuous process of examination and validation of current treatment processes. The Washington Aqueduct is working in close partnership with its major wholesale customers, Arlington, DC Water, and Fairfax along with EPA and regional and national experts to keep ahead of emerging disinfection issues and to provide the citizens with the best possible drinking water.