

# It is safe to chlorinate drinking water supplies

Chlorine kills bacteria that can get into water supplies and spread disease – helping to ensure water supplies are safe to drink.

Chlorine has been used safely all over the world for around 120 years. It keeps millions of people all round the world safe from waterborne illness – including most of New Zealand.

The benefits of chlorinated water in controlling infectious diseases far outweigh any risks associated with chlorination.

**The International Agency for Cancer Research (IARC) do not believe chlorinated water is either a probable or even possible cause of cancer.** Any theoretical risk of

chlorination can be mitigated by the removal of organic matter in water pipes and by closely monitoring levels of disinfection by products.



## Why drinking water needs to be treated

International experts are in agreement that drinking water should always be disinfected even if the source of the water is protected from influences from the surface (such as deep groundwater). This is because contamination can occur in the pipes or reservoirs the water flows through (such as repairs, backflow, and deterioration with age).

A well operated water treatment system reduces the risk of water supplies becoming contaminated.

## What happens when drinking water becomes contaminated

Contaminated water can result in disease spreading quickly through a population.

About 5,500 of the 14,000 residents in Havelock North were estimated to have become ill with campylobacteriosis in 2016. Around 45 were subsequently hospitalised. This outbreak may have contributed to three deaths, and an unknown number of residents continue to suffer health complications.

## Chlorine can make water taste “yucky”

The taste of chlorine is most noticeable at the beginning of the chlorination process. The taste becomes less noticeable over time.

**Keep drinking water in a jug in the fridge if you are concerned about chlorine in your water.** The chlorine will dissipate out of the water naturally over a few hours.

[Download the Water NZ Information Sheet on the chlorine debate: to treat or not to treat water.](#)