

# Using a Surface Water Source for Drinking

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## What is surface water?

Surface water is any source of water that is open to the atmosphere and is subject to runoff from the land. This includes lakes, streams, rivers, ponds and springs.

## What are the concerns regarding surface water?

It is very likely that surface water sources will contain micro-organisms, such as bacteria, viruses and parasites, that can cause cramps, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, and in some cases more serious, or even fatal, illnesses. Those with weak immune systems, such as the young, the elderly and the sick are more likely to become ill.

## Can I drink water from a roadside spring?

Roadside springs are surface water sources and are not considered to be a reliable, safe drinking water supply.

## Can I drink surface water?

Surface water **should never be consumed** unless you are absolutely certain the water has been properly filtered and disinfected and water testing has demonstrated that the water is safe to drink.

## What is filtration and disinfection?

Filtration is the process where particles in the water are physically removed and disinfection is the inactivation of micro-organisms in the water using a disinfectant. For surface water sources, filtration and disinfection should be used in combination with the water being filtered first to ensure that particles in the water do not interfere with efficiency of the disinfectant.

Chlorine and ultraviolet (UV) light are two common disinfectants.

All equipment used should be certified that it meets the appropriate NSF standards.

## How often should I test my water?

Private homeowners should test their water every six months for bacteria and once per year for chemical and physical quality. Registered public drinking water supplies should consult the *Guidelines for Monitoring Public Drinking Water Supplies* for information on testing frequency.

## Is it okay if I use a surface water supply for my home?

It is recommended that a surface water supply only be used as a last resort if the groundwater quality and quantity are not acceptable for supplying your home. If you do choose to use a surface water supply, you must ensure that the water has been properly filtered and disinfected and water testing has demonstrated that the water is safe to drink.

## Where can I get more information?

For more information contact the Nova Scotia Environment office nearest you at **1-877-9ENVIRO**, or **1-877-936-8476**.