



## What can I do if my water is unsafe to drink?

If your water is unsafe, seek short term water solutions. Short term water solutions include: home water filters, vended or bottled water. Boiling water may kill things like bacteria and pathogens, but often concentrates other contaminants (such as arsenic and nitrate), making those problems worse. You should find out why your water is unsafe. This will help you determine which short term solution is best for you.

### Home water filters

Many times, the most cost-effective short-term solution is installing a water treatment device in your home. Depending on the type of device that you need, prices can range from \$30 to \$400 or more for a treatment device on or under your sink. Different kinds of treatment devices take out different contaminants, you first have to know what is in your water. Once you know exactly what contaminant is making your water unsafe, find a treatment device that is certified to reduce or remove that specific contaminant. If you have high levels of **more than one type of contaminant** in your water, look for devices that are listed as certified under all those contaminants. A full list of approved treatment devices is available for each contaminant at <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/certlic/device/Pages/watertreatmentdevices.aspx> or by calling the California Dept. of Public Health at (916) 449-5600.

### Questions to think about before buying a filter, either in a store or from a vendor:

- What contaminant is the filter able to remove or reduce?
- Is the filter certified by DPH?
- Is the filter an under-the-sink, counter, on-the-tap or all home filter?
- Where can you get replacement filters? How expensive are they?

### WARNING

It is extremely important that the device is properly installed and maintained. If you do not change the filters in the treatment device regularly, for example, contaminants may build up and release bursts of extremely high levels, causing much more serious exposure. Also, keep in mind that these water treatment devices only work on the sinks where they are installed, so they will **NOT** reduce exposure in the shower, for example. Some devices are available to filter water for the whole home, however these are much more expensive.

### Vended water

Water vending machines are designed to remove secondary contaminants – those affecting the flavor and smell of the water only. In fact, the machines are only tested for one health-based contaminant – coliform bacteria – once every six months. So relying on vended water to reduce your intake of primary, health-based contaminants like arsenic or nitrates, is not a good idea. Vended water is not always a good option.



**Do NOT use vended water if:**

- the local Public Water System's water has a contaminant over legal limits; or
- the machine does not list its last date of service (cleaning); or
- if the last service date is more than a month old.

It is illegal to operate a vended water machine if the tap water feeding it is in violation of a drinking water standard. So if your community's drinking water is not drinkable, neither is the vending machine water.

**Be an informed consumer:**

- Only purchase vended water from vending machines that are located in a community where the local drinking water meets all public health standards.
- Check the last date of service (cleaning).

**Bottled water**

Bottled water may be a good short-term solution when your tap water is contaminated, but it can be very expensive over time. Keep in mind, however, that although all bottled water companies must have a license from DPH's Food and Drug Branch, there are actually fewer legal requirements for testing bottled water to ensure that it is safe than there are for your tap water.

**Vended Water vs. Bottled Water**

Remember, bottled water is sealed before it is sold to you. If you fill your own reusable bottles through a machine, that is called vended water. The quality of vended water is much less reliable than bottled water.