



A Warning about Vended Water

Water vending machines are common in California. They're found in front of, and sometimes inside, most grocery stores, and also as independent *waterias*. Vending machines are connected to a tap water line, and use multiple filters to cleanse the water. The water is then dispensed to paying customers who bring their own container.

How safe is the water from the vending machines?

If you have health concerns about your drinking water, vended water is **NOT** a solution. 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 a good alternative under some conditions:

- if you are trying to improve the taste or smell of your water.
- if you are unable to use a filter for your own tap water

For instance, if your water is high in minerals, or tastes strongly of chlorine, the filtration process in the vended water machine can really improve the taste of your drinking water. Just remember that it is likely less expensive in the long-run to install a filter on the tap in your home than continue to pay for vended water.

Vended water is not always a good option. Do NOT use vended water if

- your local water providers has a contaminant over legal limits; or
- the machine does not list its last date of service (cleaning); or
- the last service date is more than a month old.

Warning: 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.

Community Water Center

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Are there maintenance regulations for vended water machines I should be aware of?

In order to function properly and not cause additional public health risks, vending machines are required to have regular maintenance. Filters need to be changed regularly, and the dispenser needs to be cleaned, as bacteria tend to form at the spigot. Machines must be maintained at least monthly, and the last service date must always be posted on the machine. Information on the machine must be posted in both English and Spanish, and two phone numbers – one for the machine operator, and one for the agency which regulates vending machines, California Food and Drug Branch under the California Department of Public Health – must be posted on the machine for customer questions or complaints. If you're concerned about the water coming out of a machine, call DPH to come out and inspect the machine.

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).

For more information, contact the machine owner or the Department of Public Health at (916) 650-6500.

If you find a problem with or have a complaint about a particular machine, call the customer complaint hotline at (800) 495-3232.

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