

Increased levels of sodium in drinking water supplies

An increase of sodium levels (salt) has been identified in the drinking water supplies of several Central Queensland communities including Tieri, Blackwater, Bluff, Middlemount and Dysart.

Sodium levels in the drinking water in these communities are currently around 200mg/L. Under usual circumstances, the level of sodium in the drinking water is between 10 and 40mg/L.

Current sodium levels do not pose a health risk to the general community.

How might this affect the community?

For the vast majority of the population, no health impacts are expected. The increased sodium levels will contribute only a small part of the recommended daily intake, and healthy bodies will manage the increase without any ill effects.

People who are monitoring their salt intake for high blood pressure, cardiovascular or heart disease, chronic kidney failure or any dietary reason need to be aware of the higher sodium concentration in their drinking water. People with these conditions may choose to drink appropriately treated tank water or bottled water.

Parents of infants less than 6 months of age who are bottle fed should be aware of the higher sodium levels in the drinking water. While these levels are unlikely to cause harm to babies, Queensland Health recommends the use of bottled water or boiled water from well-maintained rain water tanks to reconstitute infant formula until water quality is restored.

Some people may find the water difficult to drink because of changes in taste. However it is still important to have adequate fluid intake. The recommended amount is 6-8 glasses of water a day. Adults or children with an upset tummy from other causes e.g. gastroenteritis, might have particular difficulty drinking the water and to ensure adequate hydration they might need to drink bottled or boiled tank water.

How much sodium should we usually consume in food or water?

In Australia the average intake of sodium through food and drink is about 4 grams (4000mg) a day.

People on low-sodium diets may restrict this to about 2 grams (2000mg) a day.

At usual sodium levels, drinking two litres of water would give you 20 to 80mg sodium. Drinking two litres of water at current sodium levels will give you 400mg sodium, which is 320 to 380mg extra.

Food is the major contributor to sodium intake. However an increased amount of sodium in drinking water does need to be taken into account for those who have to monitor their sodium intake on a regular basis. While there are no health-based guidelines for sodium levels in water, the National Health and Medical Research Council's Australian Drinking Water Guidelines recommend that based on taste, sodium in drinking water should not exceed 180mg/L.

How much sodium should babies consume?

The recommended daily intake of sodium for babies up to the age of 6 months is 120mg a day. Higher sodium intake will not make a baby sick, but is not recommended.

What about bottled water?

It is important to be aware some bottled water also has a high sodium level. Check the concentration of sodium on the label if using bottled water. People on low sodium diets should look for levels less than 40mg/L.

What is being done to return the water to usual quality?

Queensland Health is working with a multi-agency Working Group chaired by the Department of Natural Resources and Water in regard to all aspects of water quality and restoration of water quality.

At each locality, strategies have been investigated or put in place to minimise the increase in sodium levels.

Sodium cannot be removed from water by boiling, filtering or any simple treatment.

How long will this go on?

While the situation is temporary, it is unclear how long it will take before the quality of the water is restored.

The community will be kept informed of any further changes.

Is the water otherwise safe?

Yes. A range of other substances in the water are being monitored, including a range of metals. These substances are well below recommended levels.

The usual water treatment processes are in place to maintain other aspects of water quality.

Where do I go for more information?

If people on low sodium diets are concerned about their sodium intake, they should contact their local health practitioner.

If people have concerns about the water quality, they should contact their local Council.