

## Drinking Water and Your Health Vocabulary

*Acute conditions:* Health conditions that have a sudden onset with symptoms are often short-lived. Examples include an asthma attack or the flu.

*Arsenic:* A highly poisonous element that is odorless and tasteless. It can contaminate drinking water as a result of natural deposits in the Earth or agricultural or industrial practices.

*Chronic conditions:* Health conditions that develop or worsen over months or years. The specific causes are often difficult to determine, and include some of the most common diseases in the U.S. such as asthma, diabetes and cancer.

*Clean Water Act:* A major piece of national legislation, first passed in 1948 and significantly expanded in 1972, that regulates the discharge of pollutants into U.S. waterways and establishes quality standards for surface water.

*Disinfection byproducts:* The results of reactions between disinfection agents and organic matter during the water treatment process.

*Lead:* A toxic metal previously used in paint, gasoline and other household products but is now banned from many uses due to its health effects, which can include behavioral problems, learning disabilities, seizures and death. Lead can be released into the air from industrial sources and can contaminate water via plumbing made with lead.

*Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE):* The Maryland state agency created in 1987 to protect and preserve the state's natural resources. MDE works with national, state and local officials to comply with existing environmental laws.

*Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH):* The state agency in Maryland responsible for issues affecting the health of residents.

*Nitrates:* Substances used as fertilizers, which can cause negative health effects if ingested via drinking water. They may enter water through agricultural runoff, septic tank leakages or other sources. Nitrates can reduce the body's ability to carry oxygen in the blood.

*Non-point source pollution:* This refers to pollution coming from various sources agricultural, industrial and urban runoff. The specific origins of nonpoint source pollution are often more difficult to trace and regulate.

*Point source pollution:* This refers to pollution coming from a specific, identifiable source such as a factory or sewage treatment plant.

*Safe Drinking Water Act:* The main federal law that protects U.S. drinking water was passed in 1974 and was updated several times. This law authorizes EPA to set standards for clean and safe drinking water and oversees state and city efforts to comply.

*Sanitary sewage:* Wastewater that comes from the sinks, toilets and showers of homes and businesses as well as wastewater from industrial uses.

*Storm sewage:* Wastewater that enters sewage from rainfall.

*Water contaminants:* Common drinking water contaminants include man-made substances from agriculture, industry and other sources, such as pesticides and other chemicals. Water can also be contaminated by naturally-occurring microorganisms or heavy metals.

*Watershed:* A geographic area that drains to a common waterway such as a stream, lake, wetland, estuary, aquifer or ocean.

*Water treatment:* The process undertaken to clean wastewater at a water treatment plant. Dirt and particles are removed from the water. Next, chlorine or another disinfectant is added to kill microorganisms. After the water is treated, it is circulated back to the community.