

Water - make it safe to drink

If you enjoy outdoor activities such as hiking, camping or four-wheel driving, you should take drinking water with you. If you run out of water, or cannot carry enough water with you for your entire trip, you may need to drink from natural water sources. Drinking untreated water such as creek water, bore water or sometimes even rainwater can lead to illnesses such as gastroenteritis and diarrhoea. The following is some simple advice on how to ensure that if you need to use natural water sources you minimise the risk of getting sick.

Avoid the danger zones

When selecting natural waters to use as drinking water there are a few commonsense rules you should follow:

- Check how it looks. The appearance of the water is not always a guarantee that it is safe to drink, but water that is clear, free of surface scum or debris, and has no odour is more likely to be free of contaminants than cloudy, smelly water that has a surface scum.
- Choose water that is free flowing rather than water that is stagnant.
- Avoid collecting water from watercourses that are downstream of:
 - Camping areas
 - Areas where mining is occurring or has occurred
 - Agricultural areas
 - Unsewered towns.

Treat natural water before you drink it

You should use natural water sources with caution and, where possible, treat the water to make it safe to drink.

The most straightforward treatment method is to boil the water before you drink it. Bring the water to a rolling boil, cool it and then use it for drinking.

Boiling is effective against most microbial contaminants, but may not make the water safe if it is contaminated with chemicals or heavy metals. If the water tastes metallic or unpleasant, do not continue to drink it.

If boiling the water is not practical other treatment methods can be used. These include chlorine and iodine tablets, handheld UV units, microfilters and purifiers. These can be purchased from camping and outdoor stores. In all cases, follow the manufacturer's recommended instructions for use.

Remember – think before you drink, and treat the water if you are unsure.

Where to get help

- Parks Victoria Tel. 131 963
- Camping store
- Your doctor
- The Environmental Health Officer at your local council
- Environmental Health Unit, Department of Human Services Victoria Tel. 1300 761 874

Things to remember

- Be self sufficient – take drinking water with you.
- Drinking untreated water from natural sources, such as bores and rivers, can lead to illnesses including gastroenteritis.
- Consider all natural water sources as suspect and treat the water before drinking.
- Water treatment methods include boiling, filtration and disinfection with chemicals like iodine and chlorine.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Parks Victoria

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