

# Color in Drinking Water

If your water suddenly changes color, it could indicate a public health concern. It is likely that something disturbed the water flow in the water main, such as a line break or firefighting, or a plumbing problem allowed unsafe water to enter the line.

- **Green or blue water:** Usually caused by corrosion of copper plumbing. If corrosion is occurring, dripping water will leave a bluish-green stain on porcelain fixtures. Certain metals that can get into drinking water from corrosion, such as copper or lead, may pose a health concern. Overly corrosive water may cause a problem with the home's piping.
- **Black or dark brown water:** Often caused by manganese in the water or pipe sediment. If the water does not clear after a few minutes of flushing all your cold-water faucets and toilets, wait about an hour and try again.
- **Brown, red, orange, or yellow water:** Usually caused by iron rust. Galvanized iron, steel, or cast-iron pipes in a home or business, or the water main can cause rusty water. While unpleasant and potentially damaging to clothes and fixtures, iron in drinking water is not a human health concern.
- **Milky white or cloudy water:** Usually caused by tiny air bubbles. If your water is white, fill a clear glass with water and set it on the counter. If the water starts to clear at the bottom of the glass first, the cloudy or white appearance is trapped air. It is not a health threat and should clear in a few minutes.

## **What are the known health effects?**

At times, water can have an unpleasant color, or appearance. These aesthetic characteristics usually do not pose a public health threat and, in most cases, they do not last long. However, a sudden change in the color of your tap water could indicate a public health concern. We do not recommend that anyone drink water that looks, smells, or tastes objectionable.

## **Is this contaminant regulated?**

Color is a secondary contaminant by USEPA, and which is a non-enforceable guideline for aesthetics. The recommended upper limit is 10 color units (standard cobalt scale); the water supplied to Mount Laurel MUA customers is below the recommended limit, with a result of <5 CU.

## **How can I reduce exposure?**

If the change in color was due to iron or manganese, the iron and manganese can be removed at point of use by reverse osmosis filtration.

**Additional information regarding the color of water, including the information referenced, can be found at:**

<https://www.epa.gov/sdwa/drinking-water-regulations-and-contaminants>

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/portals/1/Documents/pubs/331-286.pdf>

<https://www.wqa.org/learn-about-water/perceptible-issues/cloudiness-discoloration>