

# Manganese and Drinking Water

*Manganese is found in drinking water throughout Minnesota. Research suggests that too much manganese from drinking water may not be good for our health. This information sheet discusses manganese in drinking water and its possible health effects.*

## Summary

Manganese is a naturally occurring element in Minnesota rocks and soil. Our bodies require a small amount of manganese but high amounts can be harmful to our health, especially in infants. Too much manganese in drinking water may affect learning and behavior in infants. In older children and adults, consuming high amounts of manganese in drinking water over time may cause neurological problems. Carbon filters, which can be purchased at grocery and home stores, can remove up to half of the manganese in your water. Short-term bottled water use may reduce exposure to manganese in drinking water, especially for infants.

## Manganese

Manganese is an element found in water, food, air, and soil. It occurs naturally in drinking water across Minnesota. Our bodies require small amounts of manganese to maintain health. Adults and children get enough manganese from the foods we eat. Infants and children younger than one year old get enough manganese from breast-milk, food, or formula.

## Manganese in Minnesota Waters

Manganese is found in groundwater throughout Minnesota because it is naturally present in Minnesota rocks and soil. Levels in groundwater do not change over time. Manganese in water may stain clothing and plumbing.

Public water supplies may test their water for manganese. If you get your drinking water from a public utility, you can call them to find out if they have tested for manganese and whether it has been found at levels above MDH guidance values.

People with private wells need to have a laboratory test their well water. The only way to know if manganese is present is to test your water. To test your water, choose a laboratory that can test for manganese at: [Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program \(http://www.health.state.mn.us/labsearch\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/labsearch).

## MDH Guidance Value

The current guidance value for manganese in drinking water is 100 parts per billion (ppb) for formula-fed infants and infants that drink tap water. The manganese guidance value for children and adults (including nursing mothers) is 300 ppb.<sup>1</sup>

## Potential Health Effects

Even though our bodies need some manganese, too much manganese from drinking water may be harmful. New research shows that too much manganese in drinking water may affect learning and behavior in infants. In older children and adults, consuming high amounts of manganese in drinking water may cause neurological problems over time. Health effects in children will not usually be obvious and have only been measured in large studies of school-aged children.

Infants are at greater risk from manganese in drinking water than children and adults because:

- their brains are developing rapidly,
- they absorb more manganese and are less able to remove manganese from their bodies, and
- they drink more water and eat more food based on body weight.

Formula-fed infants get enough manganese from formula to meet their dietary needs. However, they may get too much manganese (above the recommended amount for nutrition) in their bodies when formula is mixed with water that contains manganese.

Breast-milk is best for infants and it contains healthy amounts of manganese. According to the Institute of Medicine, breast-milk, food, and formula should be the only sources of manganese for newborns and infants younger than one year old.

## Filtering Drinking Water

In some cases, you may want to filter your drinking water to reduce the amount of manganese. If infants will be regularly drinking tap water or formula mixed with tap water, use a filter if manganese is detected above 100 ppb. If only children and adults will be drinking tap water, use a filter if manganese is detected above 300 ppb.

Carbon filters (that may also contain an ion exchange resin) used in common pitcher or faucet filter systems may remove up to 50 percent of manganese from drinking water. These filters can be purchased at grocery and home stores. To identify a filter that may remove more manganese from water, visit:

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/water/factsheet/com/pou.html>.

## Short-Term Bottled Water Use

You may choose to reduce your exposure to manganese by using bottled water. For infants up to one year old who are regularly drinking water or formula mixed with water, you should use bottled water that is labeled as *distilled* or *purified* because manganese levels will be below the health-based guidance of 100 ppb for infants. Other bottled water is likely to have manganese levels less than 300 ppb and should be suitable for household members over one year of age.

## Health Risk Assessment Unit

The MDH Health Risk Assessment Unit evaluates the health risks from contaminants in groundwater. MDH works in collaboration with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to understand the occurrence and environmental effects of contaminants in water.

## References

1. Minnesota Department of Health. Manganese: Tiered Health Based Guidance for Water. Updated May 2012. <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/risk/guidance/gw/manganese.html>.

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