

Bottled Water: Questions and Answers

This information sheet answers common questions about bottled water. Bottled water is water sealed in a bottle or other container. Note that bottled water is different from vended water, which comes from a machine that dispenses water into a container.

Is bottled water safer than tap water?

There is no reason to believe that bottled water is safer than tap water. Tap water and bottled water generally have the same quality standards.

How do tap water and bottled water regulations compare?

Tap water from public water systems is regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under the Safe Drinking Water Act. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) regularly tests public tap water for safety. The EPA requires the results of this testing to be made available to the public. The EPA also requires information about potential health effects of drinking water contaminants, the source of the water, and compliance with regulations to be made public.

Bottled water is regulated as a food product by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA does not require bottled water companies to use certified laboratories for water quality testing or to report test results. The FDA does require bottled water labels to list ingredients and nutritional information.

Where does bottled water come from?

Bottled water comes from a variety of sources, including many of the same sources as tap water. Sometimes the water you can buy in a bottle is simply public tap water that has been enhanced in some way, such as changing the mineral content. Other sources of bottled water include springs, wells, and surface waters.

How is bottled water labeled?

The labels on bottled water must meet legal requirements. There are labeling requirements for the source, content, quality, and uses of the water. These requirements are in place to ensure that labels accurately reflect the product. For example, if the label on the bottle says “spring water,” then the water must come from a spring.

When is drinking bottled water recommended?

In some cases, bottled water may be the best choice, such as:

- When a safe supply is not available, such as during a camping trip.
- During a natural disaster.
- If your public water system notified you that your water may be contaminated.
- If a test shows your private well water is contaminated and you do not have treatment to address the contaminant in your drinking water.

In these situations above, it is especially important to use bottled water for mixing infant formula or giving water to babies less than one year old.

Bottled water may also be the best choice if a person has a health condition requiring lower levels of some substance. Talk to your doctor for advice on whether bottled water is appropriate for you.

What about fluoride?

Fluoride is an essential component in the reduction of tooth decay. Fluoride is important

BOTTLED WATER: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

for everyone, from babies getting their first teeth to adults.¹

Adding fluoride to public water is an effective public health measure to prevent tooth decay and improve oral health. In Minnesota, water from municipal public water systems almost always has fluoride.² In contrast, bottled water may not contain fluoride, or if it does, it may not be at an optimal level.

If you buy bottled water, it is important to find out how much fluoride, if any, there is in the water. Some companies add fluoride to their product, and the amount must be included on the label. If fluoride is in the water naturally, the label does not have to include fluoride information. Contact the bottling company to find out how much fluoride is in their product.

Are the plastic bottles safe to reuse?

MDH does not recommend reusing single-use plastic bottles. Reused bottles may be contaminated with bacteria and other disease-causing organisms. Reusing the bottles may expose people to these unhealthy

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December 2021

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¹ [Association of State & Territorial Dental Directors, White Paper: Fluoride Toothpaste \(PDF\)](http://www.astdd.org/www/docs/fluoride-toothpaste-white-paper.pdf) (<http://www.astdd.org/www/docs/fluoride-toothpaste-white-paper.pdf>), January 2016, accessed 05/05/2021.

² [Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Fluoride Use in Caries Prevention in the Primary Care Setting | American Academy of Pediatrics](https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/146/6/e2020034637) (<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/146/6/e2020034637>), December 2020, accessed 05/05/2021

³ [How Much Does Bottled Water Cost? - Bottled Water | IBWA | Bottled Water](https://bottledwater.org/how-much-does-bottled-water-cost/#:~:text=How%20Much%20Does%20Bottled%20Water%20Cost%3F%20According%20to,water%20is%20available%20at%20many%20differing%20price%20points.) (<https://bottledwater.org/how-much-does-bottled-water-cost/#:~:text=How%20Much%20Does%20Bottled%20Water%20Cost%3F%20According%20to,water%20is%20available%20at%20many%20differing%20price%20points.>) 2019, accessed 05/19/2021

microorganisms. Empty bottles should be recycled to reduce the amount of trash in our landfills.

How long does bottled water last?

The FDA considers bottled water to have an unlimited shelf life if it is produced properly and is unopened. Bottled water companies may choose to add a date to the bottle due to concerns about taste and odor, not safety. Bottled water should be stored in a cool location away from direct sunlight.

How does the cost of bottled water compare to tap water?

Bottled water can cost thousands of times more than tap water. In Minnesota, tap water costs 0.58 cents (\$0.0058) per gallon on average. According to the Beverage Marketing Corporation (BMC), the average wholesale price per gallon of domestic non-sparkling bottled water was \$1.18 in 2019³.