

Regarding Notice Issued in Dec 2019: Uralla Town Water arsenic levels above drinking water guidelines

Key points

- Uralla town water should not be used for drinking or food preparation until further notice
- No health effects are expected as a result of previously drinking town water

Levels of arsenic over Australian Drinking Water Guidelines (0.01 mg/L) have been detected in the drinking water of the town of Uralla. It is unlikely that anyone will have experienced health effects as a result of drinking this water to date.

Arsenic is a chemical found naturally in the earth's crust in soil, rocks, and minerals. The levels of arsenic found in drinking water systems can vary widely. Arsenic at a level of 0.04mg/L was detected on routine testing of town water collected on 26 November 2019. Arsenic levels were below Guideline levels when tested in August 2019 and for all other testing conducted over the last 15 years. Uralla Council has been working to adjust the treatment plant to bring arsenic levels down below guidelines levels. However further testing done in December 2019 and January 2020 identified persistent levels of 0.04-0.05 mg/L arsenic.

An expert panel recommended that as a precaution people avoid drinking and cooking with Uralla town water while adjustments are being made to water treatment. Until the water treatment plant is able to maintain the arsenic levels below guideline values, water is being trucked in for Council to distribute to community members for drinking and food preparation.

Arsenic is not well absorbed through the skin and so bathing, swimming and showering with town water may continue. Swallowing of town water should be avoided.

If people are exposed to drinking water with high levels of arsenic (many times the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines) for a number of years, some could experience skin damage or irritation, or problems in a range of body organ systems and cancers. Short term exposure at the levels measured in Uralla town water will not cause cancer, other chronic health conditions or impact on pregnancy.

At the current levels of exposure through Uralla drinking water, there is no value in testing for arsenic in urine, hair, skin or nails. Therefore the expert panel advises that testing is not recommended.

For any questions related to water supply please contact Uralla Shire Council – 67786300

For any specific health concerns, please visit your GP or call Hunter New England Public Health Unit on 1300066055.