



Safe-Water Guidelines for Patients with Weakened Immunity

*University of
Pittsburgh
Medical Center
Information
for Patients*

Your doctor or nurse will tell you if you should follow these guidelines.

When your immunity is weakened, it's easier for you to get infections. It is very important to be careful about the water you use for drinking, cooking, and brushing your teeth. Following are some guidelines.

Tap water

Tap water is water from your faucet. It usually is considered safe if the water source is a city water supply or a municipal well that serves an area with a lot of people.

If you live in a small community, call your local water authority, and ask if your water is tested daily to detect bacteria that cause infection.

Well water

If your water at home is from a private well or small community well, you should boil the water. Or you should use approved bottled water instead of water from the well.

To boil the water so it will be safe, heat it to a full rolling boil. Keep the rolling boil going for at least 1 minute before you use the water. Store the boiled water in a clean, covered container in the refrigerator. Throw out the water after 72 hours (3 days).

Water from a private well should be tested at least once each year. The water should be used only if the test shows that it is free from "coliform organisms." This term means bacteria that could cause infection.

Sometimes a well is more likely to be infected. Your well is more at risk if:

- there is construction near it
- the well is shallow
- the well is near a dairy or livestock

Test your water more often if it is at risk.

After spring runoff or any flooding, do not use well water until it has been tested.

No matter how often well water is tested, you can't be sure it will stay safe. You have to test it again.

Bottled water

If you buy bottled water, be sure that the label has one of the following statements about how it was cleaned:

- reverse osmosis filtration

OR

- distillation

Water filters

If you get water from a city water supply or a large municipal well, the water does not need to be filtered to be clean. If you have a home water filtration system, read the label to find out who makes it. Call that company and ask what you need to do to keep your filter clean. Explain your medical condition. If you aren't sure your filter will make your water safe, it may be better to drink boiled water or approved bottled water.

Most water filtration systems can make the water safe only if chlorine has been added to the water supply. They will not make water safe if it is from a private well or small community well.

If your water comes from a private well or small community well, boil the water or use approved bottled water.

For more information on approved filtering systems, visit the National Sanitation Foundation's Web site at www.nsf.org, or call 1-800-673-6275.



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For help in finding a doctor or health service that suits your needs, call the UPMC Referral Service at 412-647-UPMC (8762) or 1-800-533-UPMC (8762).

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