

SALTWATER INTRUSION

Healthcare Providers FAQ



**SOUTHEAST
LOUISIANA
READY**

Due to prolonged drought in the northern river basins, the water levels of the lower Mississippi River are extremely low, allowing saltwater from the Gulf of Mexico to come upstream. This phenomenon, known as saltwater intrusion, can affect local water supplies because many public drinking water systems in south Louisiana rely on fresh water from the Mississippi River.

The Louisiana Department of Health (LDH), along with regional, state and federal partners, is actively monitoring the situation and conducting water quality testing and analysis to provide regular updates to the general public and healthcare providers about impacts to water systems and necessary precautions.

We are urging residents of the Southeast Louisiana parishes affected by the salt water intrusion to stay informed by signing up for their local text alert systems. Visit emergency.la.gov/saltwater to get the latest updates on the saltwater intrusion in southeast Louisiana.

»»» What public health and emergency response precautions should healthcare providers take for their practices/offices/facilities?

- May use regular water sources for general cleaning, washing, laundering and hygiene (bathing, showering, etc.)
- Conserve water when possible
- Avoid well water unless it has been tested for safety
- Secure sufficient bottled water for drinking (purified, spring, distilled) for your staff, patients (human and animal), visitors, and for any treatments and procedures (e.g., eyewash stations)
- Educate your staff and patients/clients

»»» What are the potential health impacts of saltwater intrusion?

High levels of salt (above 250 mg per liter) in drinking water can make it unsafe, especially for vulnerable patients including but not limited to patients with kidney disease or high blood pressure, patients on a low-sodium diet, dialysis patients, infants and pregnant women. The health effects of drinking salt water have been found to be associated with cardiovascular diseases, diarrhea and abdominal pain. Separately, there are downstream health impacts should salt water corrode pipes and leach heavy metals into the water supply.

»»» What guidance should be given to dialysis patients?

LDH is in close communication with dialysis providers who are aware and equipped to accommodate many changes in water quality. Patients undergoing home hemodialysis should stay in close contact with their providers who are able to make arrangements to ensure they receive necessary care.

»»» What guidance should be given to parents or caregivers of infants who formula feed?

For infants, ensure parents and caregivers use bottled spring/purified water to prepare formula if breastfeeding is not an option. Ready-to-feed formula (“RTF”) or pre-made formula is also recommended for use. Retailers have been notified about the potential increased demand for RTF formula during this event.

Bottled water will be available for WIC participants at WIC clinics throughout affected parishes. WIC clinic locations can be found on [LDH’s website](#).

»»» Whom should my patients reach out to regarding baby formula concerns and guidance?

Patients can call the Office of Public Health’s (OPH) Bureau of Nutrition Services at **504-568-8225**.

»»» Does OPH provide information on the safety of community water systems where my patients/clients live or gather?

Yes. Water systems will notify their customers of High Sodium Water Advisories. You can find the current list of High Sodium Water Advisories [here](#). Providers can call OPH’s Infectious Disease Epidemiology (ID-Epi) hotline at 1-800-256-2748.

»»» Is using salt water for showering and bathing safe?

Different water systems may react differently to saltwater intrusion. Generally, however, bathing in or showering with salt water is not unsafe, unless there are additional water advisories. Residents will be notified by local and state officials if water is unsafe for everyday activities such as these.

»»» How do I register for health alerts related to the saltwater intrusion?

LDH provides health alerts to healthcare providers (Louisiana Health Alert Network). You can register for alerts via email at eocwatch@la.gov.

You can also set up Health Alert Network messages by visiting <https://ldhoph.onthealert.com/Terms/Index/?ReturnUrl=%2f>.

»»» To whom do I report abnormal levels of metals (e.g., copper, lead, mercury, zinc, cadmium, arsenic, etc.) or sodium-related pathology like hypernatremia seen in patients/clients?

If suspected to be a result of this saltwater intrusion event, please report such cases to OPH’s ID-Epi hotline at **1-800-256-2748** (clinicians only).



»» Which state or local agencies/organizations can provide bottled water for the community?

Please check first with your parish government or parish's emergency operations center.

»» How long will this incident last?

The latest forecasts by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are being posted at emergency.la.gov/saltwater. That said, given this is the second consecutive year in which saltwater from the Gulf of Mexico has moved further up the Mississippi River, we could see more saltwater intrusion events in the future.

»» What if I or my patients have more questions? Is there a hotline for the public and providers?

Yes. Water systems will notify their customers of High Sodium Water Advisories. You can find the current list of High Sodium Water Advisories [here](#). Providers can call OPH's Infectious Disease Epidemiology (ID-Epi) hotline at 1-800-256-2748.

»» What websites and other resources are available for healthcare providers?

The main hub for all saltwater intrusion information can be found at emergency.la.gov/saltwater.

Other health resources include:

- Louisiana Department of Health
<https://ldh.la.gov>
- LDH Drinking Water Advisories
ldh.la.gov/page/4595
- LDH WIC Program
<https://ldh.la.gov/page/Louisiana-WIC>
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking>
- U. S. Food and Drug Administration
<https://www.fda.gov>