

SALTWATER INTRUSION

Frequently Asked Questions



**SOUTHEAST
LOUISIANA
READY**

Due to low water levels in the lower Mississippi River, saltwater from the Gulf of Mexico is currently intruding upstream. This phenomenon is known as saltwater intrusion.

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.

When or if your water system is affected, a saltwater advisory, or “High Sodium Water Advisory” will be issued, along with the proper precautions and actions needed for your area.

We encourage residents of the Southeast Louisiana parishes affected by the saltwater 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.

GENERAL HEALTH + SAFETY

»» How do I know if my drinking water contains a high level of salt?

Most people will stop drinking their tap water due to a noticeable difference in taste long before it is unsafe. That said, water systems will notify their customers of High Sodium Water Advisories if chloride levels reach 250 parts per million (or mg per liter). You also can find the current list of High Sodium Water Advisories [here](#) on LDH’s website.

- Local water systems report 20-60 parts per million (or mg per liter) of salt in their tap water on any given day. That level is similar to most water systems throughout the country.
- A 20-ounce bottle of Gatorade contains 270 mg per liter of salt.

Different water systems may react differently to saltwater intrusion, so precautions may vary. This is why it’s important to remain aware of any updates and advisories issued by your water system, sewage water board, parish government or other state agencies.

»» Is it safe for me to use salt water for other everyday needs?

Generally, yes, showering, bathing, washing your hands, and doing dishes with salt water are safe, 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.

Although it is generally safe to bathe with salt water, infants, young children and children with developmental or behavioral challenges may be at risk of swallowing the water while bathing or playing in running water and should be monitored closely to prevent them from doing so.



»» Why does saltwater intrusion pose a health risk?

Salt water can make drinking (and cooking) water unsafe, especially for vulnerable people including people with kidney disease or high blood pressure, people 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.

Talk to your primary care provider regarding your specific health risks, questions and concerns.

HEALTH + SAFETY OF PREGNANT WOMEN + INFANTS

»» What are the health concerns/risks for pregnant women in areas under a High Sodium Water Advisory? What precautions should they take?

Pregnant women should not consume water with high levels of salt. A high-sodium diet during pregnancy can increase the risks of hypertension and cardiovascular disease for their child. However, when you're pregnant, drinking plenty of water is important for yourself and your baby, so expectant mothers should drink (and cook with) bottled water instead. Talk to your medical provider about any concerns.

»» What are the health concerns/risks for my infant if my water system is under a High Sodium Water Advisory? What precautions should I take?

It is not safe for infants to consume water with high levels of salt. A baby's kidneys are still immature, and they aren't able to filter out excess salt as efficiently as adult kidneys.

If breastfeeding is not an option, use bottled water to prepare powdered or liquid concentrate formula. Ready-to-feed formula (which does not require any preparation with water) is another option. Residents with concerns about baby formula can call the Office of Public Health's Bureau of Nutrition Services at 504-568-8229.

In response to the saltwater intrusion, the Louisiana Department of Health will continue to stock bottled water for WIC families with infants being fed with powdered/liquid concentrate formula. WIC clinic locations can be found on [LDH's website](#). WIC families can also call 1-800-251-BABY.





HEALTH + SAFETY OF PETS

Can my pet drink salt water?

Animals cannot safely consume water that contains high levels of salt. Water systems will notify their customers of High Sodium Water Advisories. But you also can find the current list of High Sodium Water Advisories [here](#) on LDH's website.

How can I ensure I am storing water safely?

Use FDA-approved food-grade water storage containers. These FDA containers will not transfer toxic substances into the water, and they can be found at surplus or camping supply stores. If you are unsure if a container is food-grade, contact the container manufacturer.

Water storage containers should:

- Have a top that can be closed tightly;
- Be made of durable, unbreakable materials (not glass);
- Have a narrow neck or opening so water can be poured out; and
- Have never been used previously to hold liquid or bleach, pesticides or solid toxic chemicals.

ABOUT THIS SALTWATER INTRUSION INCIDENT

Where is the saltwater wedge now?

Visit the website of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to track the location of the saltwater wedge:

<https://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/Missions/Engineering/Stage-and-Hydrologic-Data/SaltwaterWedge/SaltwaterWedgeNow/>

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, where you can find the latest updates on saltwater intrusion. That said, given this is the second consecutive year in which salt water from the Gulf of Mexico has moved further up the Mississippi River, we could see more saltwater intrusion events in the future.

Can the salt water damage my pipes? If so, what should I do to prevent this?

Over time, high levels of salt water can cause damage to plumbing, appliances, cooling systems that use water, and water heaters. The best source of information for specific equipment under these conditions is the manufacturer, vendor, and/or service provider. If you suspect pipe corrosion, call a professional plumber and refrain from using the water.



DRINKING WATER SYSTEMS

»» How do I determine which water system supplies water to my home?

Check your water bill to identify your water system and its contact information. If you're a renter, ask your landlord.

»» What are water systems doing to address the possibility of salt water in their systems?

Water systems along the Mississippi River are actively assessing a wide range of variables and evaluating options to address saltwater impacts. In partnership and close communication with the Louisiana Department of Health, water systems in Southeast Louisiana are monitoring daily the levels of salt in the water. Appropriate alerts and advisories will be issued as needed and with as much advance notice as possible.

»» Can salt water be removed at water treatment plants?

No, water treatment plants are not equipped to remove salt from water because the Mississippi River is freshwater. Ordinarily, there would be no need to remove salt.

That is why state, federal and regional officials are coordinating to barge in fresh water for residents of impacted communities, and why LDH is working closely with water systems to monitor salinity levels and issue advisories and health guidance as needed.

»» Can my business or property use an emergency well? If so, what do I need to know?

Yes. See this LDH webpage for more information about private wells: <https://ldh.la.gov/subhome/56>.

»» Will the salt water increase contaminants in the water supply? How can I protect myself?

Introducing salt water to drinking water systems could undermine corrosion prevention methods. This could cause substances like iron and lead from older pipes in our water systems to dissolve into the treated water.

More data is needed to understand the impacts higher salt levels may have over time. Water systems are working with experts at LDH and the EPA to prepare a corrosion sampling plan to increase our testing for lead and many other substances as needed.

If the amount of salt in drinking water reaches 250 parts per million, alternate sources of drinking and cooking water will be necessary. The Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness will support local water systems in providing drinking water if needed. New Orleans residents can contact (504) 52-WATER if they have concerns.

You can also visit the following resources to learn how to limit exposure to corroded metals in your drinking water:

- [EPA Infographic about Lead in Drinking Water](#)
- [EPA's Website](#)
- [CDC's Website](#)
- [SWBNO's Lead Awareness webpage](#)



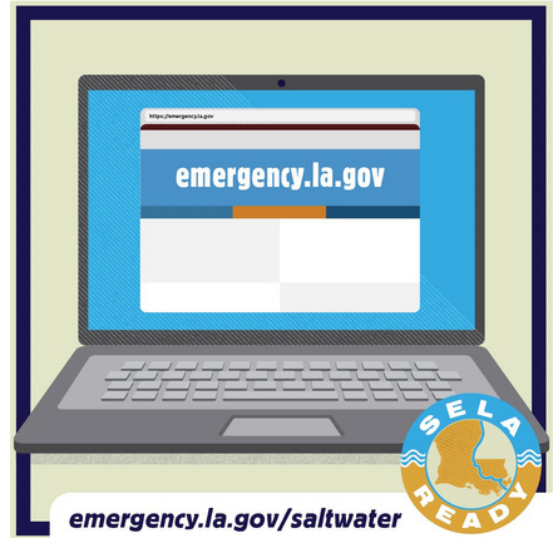
ACTIONS STEPS + RESOURCES

How can the public prepare? Should I buy water?

Stay up to date on the situation, and share accurate information with your community members and loved ones. Make sure you have trusted sources for news outside of social media posts that can be inaccurate and fuel unnecessary anxiety. Visit emergency.la.gov/saltwater to get the latest updates on the saltwater intrusion in Southeast Louisiana.

We encourage residents of the Southeast Louisiana parishes affected by the saltwater intrusion to stay informed by signing up for their local text alert systems. These systems are free and provide specific guidance based on your parish:

- Jefferson: Text JPALERT to 888777
- Orleans: Text NOLAREADY to 77295
- Plaquemines: Sign up at shorturl.at/kzKL5
- St. Bernard: Sign up at shorturl.at/oK124



In preparation for hurricane season (which we're still in, unfortunately), you should have at least one gallon of water per person per day for a minimum of five days. That said, there's no need to rush to buy bottled water in bulk for this saltwater incident. Because this is an isolated regional issue, there will be plenty of water available to be shipped in and distributed. If you'd like, you can prepare by filling reusable containers with tap water now, that way you'll have it if you need it.

I have heard about at-home kits for testing the saltiness of my water. Are those accurate?

There is a wide range of quality and accuracy among commercially available home water tests, and they are not as accurate as tests performed in a laboratory that uses high-tech equipment and scientific testing methods.

The Louisiana Department of Health is working closely with all water systems affected by the saltwater intrusion. Any water system which exceeds 250 parts per million of chloride will issue a High Sodium Water Advisory. You can check the current list of High Sodium Water Advisories [here](#).

What can I do to reduce or eliminate salt from my drinking water at home?

Salt is extremely difficult to remove from drinking water and cannot be taken out through boiling or conventional filtration like Brita filters or other common household store-bought water filters. Technically, at-home reverse osmosis systems exist, but they're expensive and often not capable of extracting this large of an amount of salinity.

Water systems will inform customers as soon as possible if and when its water becomes impacted by salt water. In partnership with city and state agencies, systems will provide guidance for customers on their drinking water consumption.