

Arsenic Fact Sheet



Arsenic is a naturally occurring element in the earth's crust. It is widely distributed throughout rocks and soil. It can also be released into the environment from agricultural and industrial activities, such as copper and lead smelting, and wood treatments. In our environment, it can enter the air and water, and can concentrate in some foods we eat. Inorganic arsenic in both drinking water and dietary sources are the primary concerns and sources of environmental exposure for the general population. Organic arsenic compounds, which are abundant in seafood, are less harmful to health.

Arsenic is found in:

- Some drinking water sources, especially ground water sources in areas known to have high levels of arsenic in the rocks and soil.
- Low levels of arsenic are commonly found in food; the highest levels are found in seafood, meats, poultry, and grains. Some examples include:
 - o Seafood, especially shellfish and seaweed.
 - o Food prepared with water containing high levels of arsenic and food crops irrigated with high-arsenic water (e.g., rice).
- Some pressure-treated wood in outdoor structures and especially sawdust or smoke from these woods. Arsenic-treated wood for residential/community uses was phased out in 2004.
- Tobacco and cigarette smoke.
- Some medicines, such as:
 - o Folk and naturopathic remedies.
 - o Anti-parasitic drugs.

Possible health concerns from excessive exposure to arsenic:

- Long-term exposure to high levels of inorganic arsenic may cause urinary bladder, lung, and skin cancers. It may lead to other health problems in some people, such as:
 - o Peripheral vascular disease.
 - o Peripheral nerves changes (symptoms may initially include numbness in the hands and feet that may progress into a painful sensation of "pins and needles").
 - o Liver injury, which may progress to cirrhosis.
 - o Skin changes, including pigmentation and hard patches on the palms and soles of the feet, which may lead to skin cancer.

Possible actions one can take to reduce excessive exposure to arsenic:

- If your water comes from a private well, have it tested for arsenic. If arsenic levels are high consider arsenic removal using an appropriate treatment/filtration system or consuming water from a different (low-arsenic) source. (If your water comes from a public water supply, it will regularly be tested for arsenic).
- Maintain a balanced diet for you and your family.
- Do not burn pressure-treated wood manufactured before 2004, and avoid using it for home projects.
- Have your children wash their hands after playing on or around wooden play structures or decks.
- If your deck was built around or before 2004, apply a protective sealant or coating every few years.
- If you work with arsenic, take all precautions to avoid bringing arsenic-containing dust home on your clothing, skin, hair, or tools.

For more information, visit: <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tfacts2.pdf> or <http://monographs.iarc.fr/ENG/Monographs/vol100C/mono100C-6.pdf> or <http://www.cdc.gov/biomonitoring/>

For more information about arsenic in New Mexico private wells, visit: https://nmtracking.org/en/enviro_n_exposure/water-qual/private-wells/private-wells-data/

For information about well testing and maintaining a well, visit: <https://nmtracking.org/water>