

# Water

## GRADING

how your drinking water  
measures up

We all want to know we are drinking safe water when we turn on the tap.

To keep the water safe it is tested:

- at the source
- at the treatment centre and
- in the pipes to our homes.

Drinking water supplies in New Zealand are usually managed by local authorities, and are regularly checked. They are then given a grade by the Ministry of Health.

Those involved in the grading process, which measures safety, are:

- a Health Protection Officer from your local public health service, and
- the water supplier.

### THE GRADING PROCESS

Water supplies are graded on how well the water source (where the water comes from) is protected, and how well the water is treated and supplied.

Water supplies are graded by examining:

- the water source
- the water quality
- how the supply is managed
- the working order of the supply
- the frequency of the water testing

A two-letter grading is given after assessment of all these aspects, eg, Bb (see tables).

Most water supplies are given gradings in the following way.

<b>Grades for the source water and its treatment:</b>
A = completely satisfactory, very low level of risk
B = satisfactory, low level of risk
C = marginal, moderate level of risk
D = unsatisfactory, high level of risk
E = completely unsatisfactory, very high level of risk
A lower grade means there is less effective care of the source water.

## KEEPING YOUR WATER SUPPLY SAFE

Contaminated water can make people ill, and that is why water supplies are regularly checked.

Bacteria, viruses and protozoa can get into the supply and cause diarrhoea or vomiting. This can be particularly dangerous for babies, old people, and people with damaged immune systems.

It is important that the source water is checked for:

- **Bacteria and viruses**  
Bacteria and viruses from animal, bird and human faeces can make water unsafe.
- **Protozoa**  
Invisible organisms, such as Giardia and Cryptosporidium, can enter the water supply from human and animal faeces and make the water unsafe.
- **Chemicals**  
Natural occurring chemicals and others such as from fertilisers can get into the source water and distribution system and make the water unsafe. The safety levels of treatment chemicals added to the supply are regularly monitored too.

<b>Grades for water distribution system - pipes, pumps, piped water:</b>
a = completely satisfactory, very low level of risk
b = satisfactory, low level of risk
c = marginal, moderate level of risk
d = unsatisfactory, high level of risk
e = completely unsatisfactory, very high level of risk
A lower grade means there is a greater risk of contamination during distribution..

### HOW OFTEN IS OUR WATER TESTED?

How often the water is tested varies according to the size of the community. Supplies for small communities are tested monthly, and supplies for large communities daily. The testing for the whole year is taken into account when the grading is given. This allows for seasonal population changes.

All supplies should comply with the Ministry of Health's *Drinking Water Standards for New Zealand (1995)*.

### HOW CAN WE FIND OUT ABOUT OUR WATER GRADING?

The grading given to each drinking water supply is listed in *the Register of Community Drinking Water Supplies in New Zealand* at your local library.

The Ministry of Health, with assistance from the Health Protection Officer and the drinking water supplier, give the grading to the local council, and sometimes it is published in the newspapers.

If there is a problem with the supply, information may be distributed to the affected community by the local public health service or the water supplier.

If you have any further queries about your drinking water quality or its grading contact a Health Protection Officer at your local public health service or an Environment Health Officer at your local council.

