



# FRESNO WATER SUPPLY - FAQ

**Q: Is Fresno's water safe to drink?**

**A: Yes.** The City's water supply is strictly regulated by state and federal government standards – among the most stringent in the world – and our water supply meets and exceeds all standards. Fresno's water treatment systems are viewed as models of good treatment throughout California.

**Q: Why is there brown/yellow/orange water coming out of my tap?**

**A:** The discoloration you see typically comes from iron that accumulated in cast iron water mains and has been picked up by a large change in flow. It usually only occurs after a significant change in flow, like when you first turn on your faucet in the morning.

**Q: Will this discoloration hurt me or anyone else in my household?**

**A:** Although iron appears unappetizing and may impart a metallic or slightly bitter taste, it offers no health threat. Extremely high levels of iron can induce nausea and vomiting, but that amount would not taste good and one would have a hard time drinking it.

**Q: What should I do if I see discoloration in my water?**

**A:** Although iron appears unappetizing and may impart a metallic or slightly bitter taste, it offers no health threat. Flush your faucet for a few minutes and the discoloration usually disappears. If you continue to see discoloration, call 621-8626 to report it.

**Q: What about the reports of lead in the water system?**

**A:** Traces of lead showed up in a small number of homes in NE Fresno while the City was testing their water for discoloration. The area reporting discolored water is within the zip codes of 93710, 93720, and 93730, generally bounded by Copper Avenue to the north, Willow Avenue to the east, State Route 41 to west, and Shaw Avenue to the south.

The City has the flexibility to serve this area with surface water from Pine Flat Reservoir and Millerton Lake or with groundwater from a number of public water supply wells located in NE Fresno.

Within this bounded area, there are approximately 22,500 homes, and the City has received reports of discolored water from 833 homes since we started this investigation.

The reports of discolored water have been occurring for both surface water and groundwater.

**Q: How did the City respond to these reports?**

**A:** The Department of Public Utilities initiated an investigation in January 2016 that included water quality sampling at residential homes, site visits and inspections at residential homes, as well as plumbing material testing and soil testing of samples collected at residential homes.

As part of the investigation, the City switched the water supply for NE Fresno to groundwater to establish a baseline for water quality conditions in the area.

Based on the preliminary results of the water quality sampling of 279 homes, with groundwater as the water supply source in the subject area, approximately 41 homes have been identified as having concentrations above of the federal and state Action Level of 15 parts-per-billion, per liter of water (15 ppb or 0.015 mg/L).

If lead concentrations exceed an action level of 15 parts per billion in more than 10% of customer taps sampled, the system must undertake a number of additional actions to control corrosion.

**Q: How many homes in Fresno are affected?**

**A:** Approximately 800 properties in Northeast Fresno are currently reporting discolored water in an area with a housing count of 22,500 homes. There have been very few reports of discoloration in homes in other parts of Fresno.

It's important to note that not every home reporting discolored water has discolored water in all fixtures.

The reports of discolored water appear to be limited to those homes with galvanized pipe installed for water service. Water samples from the affected homes are showing the presence of iron, manganese, zinc, copper, and lead.

**Q: What is the source of these particulates in the discolored water?**

**A:** The City is not pumping lead from either the aquifer or from Millerton Lake or Pine Flat Reservoir into the distribution system.

The City's water distribution system in NE Fresno is non-metallic (plastic and asbestos-cement concrete), and also contains no lead.

The discolored water – and the presence of particulates – is caused by galvanized pipe corrosion and fixture corrosion occurring at residential properties and their plumbing system components – fixtures, fittings, piping, and hose-bibs.

**Q: Why didn't the City's building inspectors prohibit the use of unwrapped galvanized pipe in these homes?**

**A:** Galvanized pipe has been, and continues to be, allowed for use in residential plumbing systems, in accordance with the State building code. In fact, until 2001, plastic plumbing materials weren't allowed for use in residential homes.

In addition, the City's building code has an inspection process that designates different standards according to the size of the home. For homes less than 3,000 square feet, plumbing plans are not required, and inspectors confirm that plumbing is installed in accordance with building code requirements. The Building Code allowed bare galvanized pipe to be installed for water service from the meter to the front of the house.

**Q: Has the city used any chemicals like corrosion inhibitors?**

**A:** Under state and federal law, the City of Fresno is required to have a program in place to minimize the concentrations of lead in drinking water, and that program has been in place since 1993, when the United States Environmental Protection Agency promulgated the Lead and Copper Rule. This program includes corrosion control treatment, and water quality monitoring at the City's Northeast Surface Water Treatment Facility and the public water supply wells that are located in Northeast Fresno.

We have been treating the water coming out of the NE Surface Water Treatment Plant with corrosion inhibitors since it began operating in 2004.

**Q: How did the lead get into the drinking water in these homes?**

**A:** Lead detections in drinking typically water exist at the home level. Sampling at our treatment plants and wells have shown no lead in our treated water. However, this contaminant leaches into water from a home's lead service lines, lead solder, and leaded plumbing materials including fixtures, faucets, and fittings.

**Q: Some individual homes showed higher numbers for lead. Isn't that a concern?**

**A:** There is no "safe" level for lead, but the State and federal guidelines for lead and copper acknowledge an important reality: Any home that has a lead service connection or lead plumbing will impart some varying amount of lead into the home's water. If you have questions, call the Department of Public Utilities at (559) 621-5300.

**Q: I have a lead service connection or lead plumbing. What should I do?**

**A:** Replacement is the only way to completely eliminate lead exposure. However, here are some interim steps homeowners can take to reduce it: Flush pipes for 1-2 minutes before drinking. The more time water has been sitting in your home's pipes, the more lead it may contain. Use only water from the cold-water tap for drinking, cooking, and especially for making baby formula. Hot water is likely to contain higher levels of lead.

You can also:

- Contact a licensed plumber to inspect your home for soil corrosion or dissimilar metal corrosion of galvanized pipe.
- Consider a full-house flush of all water fixtures in the home, including the water heater.
- Replace existing indoor plumbing fixtures with lead-free plumbing fixtures.
- Purchase point-of-use filtration devices for fixtures used to draw water for drinking and cooking.

**Q: Do I need to boil my water?**

**A:** No. This is not an emergency. The City of Fresno's water supply is safe, clean, and reliable. If this were an emergency you would have been notified within 24 hours if our water supply had been contaminated.

**Q: Should I buy bottled water?**

**A:** You do not need to buy bottled water for health reasons. The City's drinking water meets all of the federal, state, or provincial drinking water standards. However, if you see discoloration in your water and would like to have your system tested, please call the Department of Public Utilities at 621-8626 to set up an appointment.