

**Subject: 32 recommendations to improve drinking water quality in BC**

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**PROVINCIAL HEALTH OFFICER RELEASES REPORT ON DRINKING WATER  
Report outlines 32 recommendations to improve drinking water quality in BC.**

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**Provincial Health Officer Releases Report on Drinking Water**

By Ministry of Health Services

**VICTORIA** - The risk of water-related illnesses in British Columbia can be dramatically reduced by actions taken everywhere from the water source to the consumer's tap, says the 2000 annual report released today by provincial health officer Dr. Perry Kendall.

The report discusses the specific microbiological and chemical agents - such as bacteria, viruses, parasites, arsenic, lead, and nitrates - that can contaminate drinking water in British Columbia. "Fortunately, many of these risks can be reduced if we are aware of how contamination can enter our drinking water, and if we take action at those junctures to prevent or reduce contamination," Kendall said.

British Columbia has a system of safeguards to protect drinking water, including pollution prevention programs for water sources and public health standards for water treatment. Even with vast improvements over the years, water-related illnesses and disease outbreaks continue to occur. Since 1980, there have been 29 confirmed waterborne disease outbreaks in British Columbia, caused by micro-organisms like giardia, cryptosporidium and campylobacter. A recent study in Greater Vancouver found that drinking water may be a major contributor to day-to-day gastrointestinal illnesses, although there is no way to track these statistics precisely.

British Columbia had 3,016 water systems under provincial jurisdiction in the year 2000, an increase of 500 in the last five years. More than half of British Columbians get their water from the two largest water systems: the Greater Vancouver Regional District system and the Capital Regional District system. Most of the small and medium-sized water systems are found in rural areas, with local health authorities having more than 300 systems under their jurisdiction.

Three-quarters of British Columbia's water supply comes from surface water - lakes, streams, creeks, rivers or rainfall. The report notes that all surface water sources are susceptible to contamination. In August 2001, 304 water systems were under boil-water advisories, up from 220 the previous year. An estimated 65 per cent of these advisories were issued to water systems that supply untreated surface water.

The report outlines 32 specific recommendations to improve drinking water quality in British Columbia. Priority recommendations are to:

- Provide legislative authority that establishes the safety of drinking water as the priority consideration when there are competing water uses.
- Consider establishing various levels of regulation, depending on the size of the water system and the population served.
- Make a commitment to co-ordination in the regulation and management of water systems.
- Require microbiological treatment standards.
- Establish a set of performance measures for drinking water systems, along with methods for public reporting of results.

The provincial health officer is required to report annually to British Columbians on their health status. Some of the reports to date have given a broad overview of health, while others have focused on particular topics such as women's health, child health or immunization. Drinking water provides the focus for this year's report.

Dr. Shaun Peck, deputy provincial health officer, led the development of the report. Medical health officers, environmental health officers, public health engineers, water system operators, the B.C. Water and Waste Association, provincial ministry staff, other drinking water experts and the public were consulted throughout the process.

Copies of Provincial Health Officer's Annual Report 2000: Drinking Water Quality in British Columbia: The Public Health Perspective are available at public libraries throughout the province, from the Office of the Provincial Health Officer or at [www.healthplanning.gov.bc.ca](http://www.healthplanning.gov.bc.ca) on the Internet.