Why water supply from Water Supplies Department (WSD) becomes turbid and yellowish when the supply resumes from a period of suspension?

When water supply from WSD resumes from a period of suspension, the sediments inside water mains may be stirred up resulting in water supply with slightly higher turbidity than normal. The contents of sediments accumulated in water mains are mainly lime, traces of iron or minerals but these sediments will not pose risks to our health or safety of water supply. In case the incident occurs, the WSD will flush our water mains at the fire hydrants in the affected areas so as to drain away the water until its clarity resumes normal. If the situation persists, the WSD will arrange water wagons to provide temporary water supply to the public in the affected areas. Management Offices of premises can also inspect their roof tanks and inside service. If water with high turbidity is observed, the Management Offices can drain the roof tanks to allow the intake of clear water as soon as possible.

Is Hong Kong’s treated water safe for consumption?

Hong Kong’s drinking water is safe.

Average chloroform (a substance considered as possibly carcinogenic to human) levels in our water have remained less than 50 μg/litre for a long time, which is far lower than the WHO guideline value of 300 μg/litre.

In our daily life, the chance of contact with carcinogenic substances through other channels is greater than that of drinking water. According to scientific research, the chance of getting cancer is less than 1 in 100 000 if you drink 2 litres of water containing 300 μg/litre chloroform every day for 70 years continuously.

Why does tap water at my home appear milky? Is there something wrong with the water quality?

Water in the plumbing system under pressure will contain more dissolved air. When the pressure drops, the dissolved air in water will be released into the water body forming numerous air bubbles, which makes the water look like milky in colour. When this condition occurs, try allowing the tap to run for a moment or let the water stand in a container for a while. The water will become clear again as the air bubble escapes. Such phenomenon will not affect the quality of the drinking water.
水的真相
FACTS ABOUT WATER

為什麼採用世界衛生組織《飲用水水質準則》作為香港的食水標準？

多年來，政府供應的食水水質一直完全符合世界衛生組織的《飲用水水質準則》（《準則》）。

世衛《準則》是由來自廣泛發達國家和發展中國家的衆多權威機構，以及數百名專家共同參與制訂及更新，代表全球科學和醫學研究的共識意見。世衛《準則》是具權威性、科學化，並以證據為本的準則，現時多個發達國家均參考世衛《準則》來監控食水水質。

政府參考了專家顧問的研究結果，並將採納於發展局委任的食水安全國籍專家小組建議，在2017年9月宣佈採用世衛《準則》作為香港的食水標準。

香港的食水標準亦會定期進行檢討，以確保標準與國際做法一致，並適用於本地情況。

Why is the World Health Organization’s Guidelines for Drinking-water Quality adopted as the Hong Kong Drinking Water Standards?

Over the years, the government has been supplying drinking water in full compliance with the World Health Organization’s Guidelines for Drinking-water Quality (WHO Guidelines).

The WHO Guidelines are prepared and updated through the participation of numerous authoritative institutions and hundreds of experts from a wide range of developed and developing countries, and represent the consensus opinion based on worldwide scientific and medical studies. The WHO Guidelines are authoritative, scientific and evidence-based, and many developed countries worldwide make reference to them to monitor and control the quality of treated water.

Having taken into account the expert consultants’ findings and consulted the International Expert Panel on Drinking Water Safety appointed by the Development Bureau, the government has announced in September 2017 to adopt the WHO Guidelines as the Hong Kong Drinking Water Standards.

Regular review will also be conducted to ensure that the Hong Kong Drinking Water Standards be consistent with the international practice and adequate for application in local context.

我家的食水可由水龍頭直接飲用？

經水務署濾水廠處理後的食水與其他先進國家一樣，品質優良，但用戶水龍頭的食水水質會受到樓宇內供水系統的維修保養狀況所影響。若大廈管理公司能實施正確保養程序包括定期安排清洗食水水箱，妥善維修及保養供水系統和密切監測水質，食水便可維持原有水質標準，無須煮沸，直接飲用。

然而，當食水經大廈的喉管送往住戶時，水質未必如濾水廠出口時的品質一樣，原因是過去本港多採用無內塗層鍍鋅管，這種喉管用上數年便開始生銹，當食水在生銹喉管內停留一段時間後便會變黃。

呈黃色的食水只含微量鐵質，不會危害健康。事實上，一般人每日從食物中吸取的鐵質，遠超過這些食水中所吸取的鐵質。在正常情況下，只須開動水龍頭沖洗片刻，水帶微黃問題通常可解決。至於食水變黃情況嚴重的個案，應需改善，則要更换水管。

此外，長期停在水管的水有機會積結沉澱物。水喉長時間靜止後（例如數小時或整夜），放水最少兩分半鐘才取水飲用或煮食。熱水可令喉管及裝置裏出更多鐵質，應避免從熱水龍頭取水飲用或煮食。

自1995年12月23日起，當局禁止使用無內塗層鍍鋅鋼管，故避免水管生銹，可使用有內塗層鍍鋅鋼管、銅管、不銹鋼管和軟管等。

水箱的保養亦十分重要。水箱污穢也會影響水質，因此必須注意及敦促大廈管理處要經常清洗水箱，並妥善維修及保養大廈的供水系統，如對供水系統的清潔有懷疑，可考慮將食水煮沸後才飲用。

居住在鄉村飲用天然水源的市民，則必須將食水煮沸後才可飲用。

Is the tap water at my home potable?

The quality of water treated by Water Supplies Department (WSD) treatment works is as good as that of many highly-developed countries and regions. However, the quality of tap water can be affected by the condition of maintenance of inside service of the building. You can drink tap water without boiling on condition that the management office of your building carries out proper upkeep procedures including regular cleansing of water storage tanks, proper maintenance of inside service and frequent monitoring of water quality to maintain the original water quality standard.

When water is delivered to consumers’ taps via inside plumbing, the quality may not be the same as the quality of water produced by the treatment works. It is because unlined galvanized pipes were widely used in Hong Kong in the past. These pipes began to corrode after being in use for several years. Discoloured water results after water has been stagnant inside the pipe for a certain period of time.

As far as is known, we suffer no harmful effects from drinking water with traces of dissolved iron. In fact, the average person’s daily intake of iron from consumption of food far exceeds that from drinking such water. Under normal circumstances, this aesthetic problem can usually be overcome by running the tap for a few seconds. For the more serious cases, replacement of the water pipes may be necessary.

When water has been standing in pipes for a long time, sediment may build up. Run the tap for at least two minutes after long periods of stagnation (for instance, after several hours or overnight) before using it for drinking or cooking. As hot water increases the amount of impurities that may leach from pipes and fittings, avoid using water from hot water taps for drinking or cooking.

Since 23 December 1965, the use of lined galvanized steel pipes has been prohibited. To avoid corrosion of pipes, other pipe materials such as lined galvanized steel pipes, copper pipes, stainless steel pipes and polyethylene pipes are recommended.

The maintenance of water storage tanks is also very important. Therefore, you should monitor the management office of your building to make sure that they regularly clean the water storage tanks and maintain the water supply system in good condition. If you have doubts about the cleanliness of the supply system in your building, you should consider boiling water for drinking.

Villagers relying on wells or streams for drinking should always boil the water for drinking.