

Water restrictions and health considerations

Water restrictions have led to increased use of alternative water supplies such as rain, ground and surface water for a range of household purposes.

With simple measures to maintain hygiene and appropriate use of these water supplies there should be minimal risk to health.

Water restrictions

In response to ongoing drought conditions, the South Australian Government constantly assesses availability and use of our water supplies. From time to time water restrictions are necessary to help conserve our water reserves including the River Murray.

Water restrictions can impact on activities such as the watering of gardens and lawns, car washing, the filling of pools and spas and washing of areas such as paving, decking and external house structures.

While water conservation measures are important, they shouldn't create a risk to public health. In most cases water conservation practices can be safely and effectively undertaken however consideration must be given to potential public health impacts of certain activities.

Basic hygiene must be maintained. This can be achieved while complying with water restrictions providing simple measures are adopted.

In certain circumstances where public health is at risk, SA Water may allow exemptions from restrictions- please contact them for details.

Current information on water restrictions can be obtained from SA Water:

Telephone: 1300 130 952

www.sawater.com.au/sawater

Potential health impacts of water restrictions

Water restrictions have led to increased use of alternative water supplies such as rain, ground and surface water.

Whether alternative water supplies are used for drinking, food preparation, filling of swimming pools or spas or watering edible plants, it is important to ensure that the water is of a quality suitable for the purpose.

- **Rainwater** – If the rainwater is clear, has little taste or smell and is from a well maintained system it is probably safe to drink and unlikely to cause any illness for most users. It is also suitable for non-drinking uses such as showering, use in pools and watering plants.
- **Groundwater (bore water)** – Bore water should be tested before being used for drinking, food preparation, use in swimming pools or spas or watering edible plants. Groundwater may contain naturally occurring hazardous chemicals and shallow groundwater can be prone to contamination from surface activities.
- **Surface water** – Surface water is unsuitable for drinking, food preparation, use in swimming pools or spas or watering edible plants unless it has been tested to see if it is fit for its intended use. Surface water usually requires treatment before it is used and may be

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suitable for showering, laundry and watering plants.

Further information is available from SA Health's Drought webpage (details below).

Increased use of greywater

Greywater is wastewater generated from bathrooms, laundries and kitchens. Kitchen water can contain food particles, grease, oils and fats and is generally not recommended for use.

Manual bucketing and temporary diversion (hose manually fitted to a washing machine outlet) of greywater is an effective means of saving water provided it is undertaken in a safe and sensible manner. Key tips for safe use are:

Don't:

- ✗ use greywater from washing clothes soiled by faeces or vomit
- ✗ store untreated greywater for more than 24 hours
- ✗ use greywater if others in the household have diarrhoea or an infectious disease
- ✗ use greywater to irrigate edible plants
- ✗ splash greywater.

Do:

- ✓ keep children away from areas watered with greywater until it has soaked into the ground
- ✓ wash hands before eating, drinking or smoking following its use.

NOTE: Manual bucketing and temporary diversion do not require Department of Health approval however the installation of permanent greywater systems does.

Information on greywater including a fact sheet on how to apply for use of a permanent greywater system is

available from SA Health's Drought webpage:

www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs/topics/drought-package.htm

Sharing of bath water

Bathing children together or sharing bathwater is a common family practice. While this activity saves water and is harmless when people are well, there is a risk of spreading illness if bath water is shared when a person is suffering from an infectious disease or diarrhoea.

Bath water should **NOT** be shared while a person has infectious diarrhoea and for 14 days after symptoms have stopped.

Diseases such as Cryptosporidiosis can be spread from swimming or bathing in contaminated water.

Pools and spas

It's important that pools and spas are maintained correctly including water replacement to ensure that water quality remains safe for use.

Pools and spas can be safely filled with:

- ✓ mains water (unless restrictions prevent this)
- ✓ rainwater (provided the tank and catchment area are properly maintained)
- ✗ Bore or surface water is not appropriate for filling pools and spas unless the water has been tested and/or treated.

Public pools and spas must be maintained as required by the *Public and Environmental Health (General) Regulations 2006*.

Wading / paddling pools

Wading pools need to be used in accordance with any water restrictions in place.

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Leaving water in wading pools for later use can help save water but may create a health and safety risk:

Don't:

- ✗ share / reuse after a child with diarrhoea has used the pool
- ✗ allow water to become a breeding ground for mosquitoes.

Do:

- ✓ be vigilant – never leave children unattended near stored water
- ✓ take the safest option – empty the wading pool after use and refill it next time. The water can be used for watering plants, lawns or for washing the car.

Collection of water in buckets or similar devices

Although the collection of buckets of greywater or rainwater is encouraged as a means of water conservation, it is important to recognise the risks of storing water.

Parents should be aware that water stored in oversized buckets, wheelie bins or other devices can become a drowning hazard for young children. These containers should be emptied between uses or secure barriers to prevent access by children should be installed.

Water stored outdoors can provide a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Water containers should be inspected for larvae regularly and emptied every few days to prevent adult mosquitoes from hatching. Storages should have secure lids to prevent mosquito breeding.

Further information

- Your local Council Environmental Health Officer
- Environmental Health, SA Health (details below).
- SA Water
General: 1300 650 951
Water Restrictions: 1300 130 952
Web: www.sawater.com.au/sawater
- Environmental Health website to access a range of water-related resources:
www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs/topics/drougnt-package.htm

Contact

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