

5 September 2008

Increased levels of sodium in Dysart and Middlemount drinking water supply

Queensland Health advises Dysart and Middlemount residents that there has been an increase of sodium levels identified in the drinking water supply.

Central Queensland Public Health Physician Dr Margaret Young said, "For the vast majority of the population, no health impacts are expected.

"But people who are monitoring their salt intake for high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, chronic kidney failure or any dietary reason need to be aware of the higher sodium concentration in their drinking water. People with these conditions may choose to drink appropriately treated tank water or bottled water.

"Parents of infants less than 6 months of age who are bottle fed should also be aware of the higher sodium levels in the drinking water. Whilst these levels are unlikely to cause harm to babies, Queensland Health recommends the use of bottled water or boiled water from well-maintained rain water tanks to reconstitute infant formula until water quality is restored.

While there are no health-based guidelines for sodium levels in water, the National Health and Medical Research Council's Australian Drinking Water Guidelines recommend that based on taste, sodium in drinking water should not exceed 180mg/L. Levels of sodium in the drinking water in these communities is currently around 200mg/L. Under usual circumstances, the level is about 40mg/L.

"Food is the major contributor to sodium intake. However an increased amount of sodium in drinking water does need to be taken into account for those who have to monitor their sodium intake on a regular basis.

"In Australia the average intake of sodium through food and drink is about 4 grams (4000mg) a day.

"People on low-sodium diets may restrict this to about 2 grams (2000mg) a day. Drinking 2 litres of water at current sodium levels represents 320mg more than usual.

Dr Young said "It is also important to be aware that some bottled water also has a high sodium level. Check the concentration of sodium on the label if using bottled water. People on low sodium diets should look for levels less than 40mg/L.

"Most sodium in water is efficiently absorbed into the body," she said.

Queensland Health is working with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Natural Resources and Water, the Isaac Regional Council and Ensham Mine in regard to all aspects of the quality of water and restoration of water quality.

Changes are being made to the depth from which drinking water is drawn thereby avoiding the more saline areas of the water storages from which it is drawn. More saline water is also being flushed from the water storages.

Whilst the situation is temporary, it is unclear how long it will take before the quality of the water is restored. Discharge of mine-affected water by the Ensham Coal Mine is nearing the end of its planned release. The community will be kept informed of any further changes.

If people on low sodium diets are concerned about their sodium intake, they should contact their local health practitioner.

If people have concerns about the water quality, they should contact the Water & Sewerage Officer of the Isaac Regional Council, Mr Murray Ball on 0417 720 504.

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