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Umwelt Bundes Amt
Für Mensch und Umwelt

How good is drinking water quality in households with children?

More results from the Federal Environment Agency's German Environmental Survey for Children

Drinking water is a staple in nutrition. Statutory requirements stipulate that drinking water may not prove grounds for adverse health concerns. It must reach all households in impeccable quality. The quality of household drinking water can, however, be poorer than what the water works discharge. Data from the German Environmental Survey for Children (KUS) carried out by the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) shows that household drinking water concentrations in most homes are lower than limit values set by the German Drinking Water Ordinance (*TrinkwV*). KUS also provides evidence that as late as 2003 to 2006, there may have been levels of lead, copper, nickel and uranium in some household in excess of current or future limit and guideline values. A report of this latest data can be downloaded free from the Internet at http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/gesundheit/survey/us03/uprog.htm.

Between May 2003 and May 2006 scientists at UBA and the Robert Koch Institute sampled drinking water in 1,790 households with children aged 3-14. UBA and its commissioned laboratories tested these samples for traces of lead, cadmium, copper, nickel, and uranium. Current evaluations of the results demonstrate that the average concentrations of lead, copper, and nickel in household drinking water in the 2003-2006 time period have changed since 1998, especially in the eastern federal states. Whereas average concentrations of lead and nickel have decreased there, average concentrations of copper have risen. These changes can be traced to remediation of drinking water plumbing systems and replacement of old pipes (lead) with copper ones.

Data from KUS supports recommendations made by UBA not to use water that has been stagnant in pipes for longer than four hours for the preparation of food or beverages. It is especially important that only fresh water be used to prepare baby food. Its main feature is that it is a bit cooler than stagnant water when it flows from the tap.

Due to the KUS drinking water test results, UBA is advising public health offices and water works as follows: in regions on the grid with elevated copper solubility in drinking water and a

large stock of copper piping in water supply systems, copper solubility must be reduced through centralised treatment so as to ensure that the limit value for copper is complied with at the household tap. It is public health offices' and water works' duty to guarantee the guideline value for uranium of 10 ↔g/l in drinking water. The cause for contamination with uranium is by and large geogenic – that is, occurring naturally in the earth- and therefore determined by a given region. UBA has advised municipalities accordingly in areas where there was a high rate of elevated concentrations of copper or uranium in household drinking water. **It remains crucial that lead pipes in homes be replaced. More consumer information is available in the free UBA booklet on tap water, *Trink was – Trinkwasser aus dem Hahn* (http://www.umweltdaten.de/publikationen/fpdf-l/3058.pdf) (in German).**
Data from the Environmental Survey for Children will be made available as a public use file to interested professionals at the end of 2008.

Dessau-Roβlau, 14 March 2008