

# Press Release No. 33/2011

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## Federal Environment Agency gives the all-clear signal on EHEC in drinking water

### Drinking Water Commission denies spread of EHEC

**The risk of EHEC breaking out via drinking water can be ruled out. Intestinal bacteria are almost never present in large water supply systems that are microbiologically monitored on a daily basis. Even very small waterworks and house wells that are monitored less regularly are highly unlikely to be host to the current strain of EHEC. UBA President Jochen Flasbarth warned against spreading unfounded panic, saying, "The independent scientists on the board of the Drinking Water Commission at the Federal Environment Agency have negated any risk posed to drinking water by the present strain of the EHEC bacteria."**

EHEC bacteria of this strain occur extremely rarely in waste water and other bodies of water. As the proportion of the population infected with EHEC is very low, the intestinal bacteria which may be present in waste water only rarely proves to be EHEC. The latest data prove the following: the infectious strain has only been detected one single time in the many water samples that have been taken in the meantime, and it was no longer present in follow-up tests. There has been no indication whatsoever to date that the EHEC strain which has triggered the current wave of infections can reproduce in bodies of water.

The current infectious strain of EHEC is an *E. Coli* bacterium. Drinking water is checked daily for presence of these bacteria. All waterworks with more than 5,000 connected customers must submit *E. Coli* reports to the Federal Environment Agency, and they show that *E. Coli* is virtually non-existent.

In the past, there have been occasional incidences of *E. Coli* detected in very small public waterworks and in certain regions that have house wells. *E. coli* quite often are harmless inhabitants of the intestine, and in drinking water they are indicators of the possible presence of other pathogens. This requires an improvement in monitoring in the near future. Yet, in its talks on 22 June 2011, the Drinking Water Commission concluded that any risk posed by the current infectious EHEC strain can be ruled out. It would take a well in an area with many infected patients coming into direct contact with sewage, and that situation is unlikely as the incidence of newly sickened is on the decline.

Further information on drinking water quality in Germany:  
Consumer report by Federal Ministry for Health and the Federal Environment Agency on water quality in potable water (drinking water) in Germany: <http://www.uba.de/uba-info-medien-e/3616.html>

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