

# NITRATE CONTAMINATION IN U.S. DRINKING WATER SYSTEMS



America has a serious problem with **nitrate contamination of drinking water**—and it is most severe in small communities that can least afford to fix it.

**10** parts per million, or ppm

The legal maximum for nitrate in drinking water, under the Safe Drinking Water Act.

**BUT**

**5** parts per million, or ppm

The amount of nitrate in water at which the **risk of cancer increases**, according to the National Cancer Institute.



**1,700**

communities nationwide had drinking water containing nitrate at or above 5 ppm.

In 2014–2015:

**1,155**

of these communities don't have a way to treat their water for nitrate contamination.

**3** million

Americans drank water from these systems.

**68% OF THE COMMUNITIES** whose drinking water systems have **nitrate above 5 ppm** and **no nitrate treatment** ARE LOCATED IN JUST 10 STATES.

Arizona, California, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas and Washington

**Customers fund community water treatment.**

The smaller a community, the fewer rate-paying customers, which means less money to clean up drinking water.

**6**/  
**10**

of the water systems that don't have a way to treat for nitrates serve **FEWER THAN 500 PEOPLE.**

**9**/  
**10**

of the water systems that don't have a way to treat for nitrates serve **FEWER THAN 3,300 PEOPLE.**

There are two common ways to treat water contaminated with nitrate. Both are costly—especially for small communities with a small tax base and, often, a low average income.

## ION EXCHANGE SYSTEM:

A resin removes nitrate as water passes through it.

For very small communities, a system could cost as much as

**\$666**

per person each year.

## REVERSE OSMOSIS:

Pressurized water is pushed through a membrane that filters out nitrate and other contaminants.

For very small communities, a system could cost as much as

**\$2,776**

per person each year.

**Nitrate pollution** is not only a problem for community water systems. Those who rely on private wells for drinking water may also be affected.

**44 million Americans**

are estimated to get their drinking water from **private wells.**

**NO ONE KNOWS HOW MUCH NITRATE IS IN THESE WELLS,**

but recent data showed that

**22%**

of the private wells tested in Iowa had nitrate levels of **5 ppm or more.\***



\* 2017 Iowa Private Well Tracking System

HOW CAN WE PREVENT THIS PROBLEM? VISIT

**EWG.ORG/RESEARCH/NITRATECOST**