



**LEHIGH COUNTY AUTHORITY**

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## **Fast Facts about Pharmaceuticals in Drinking Water**

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### **Overview**

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Lehigh County Authority (LCA) is a public water and wastewater utility committed to providing high-quality, affordable and reliable service to residents and businesses in all our service areas. We provide water service to about 45,000 residents throughout Lehigh and Northampton counties. We also provide municipal-level and customer-level sewer service in many areas of western and northern Lehigh County.

Ensuring the safety of our drinking water is LCA's top priority, and is a responsibility we take very seriously. Our regular water quality monitoring program shows that our drinking water meets all state and federal standards for safety, and LCA publishes all test results in a water quality report that is posted on our public web site ([www.lehighcountyauthority.org](http://www.lehighcountyauthority.org)) and mailed to all customers every year. LCA does not currently test for pharmaceuticals in our drinking water supplies.

### **Pharmaceuticals Q & A:**

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#### ***What are pharmaceuticals, and how do they get into drinking water?***

Pharmaceuticals are a group of compounds consisting of prescription or over-the-counter drugs that have been detected in trace amounts in some U.S. drinking water supplies. They enter the water supply through normal human consumption and elimination through wastewater (sewage) systems, as the human body eliminates small amounts of any drugs you may be taking. Recent news reports have shown commonly used drugs such as antibiotics, anti-convulsants, mood stabilizers and hormones are making their way into the drinking water sources of major metropolitan areas such as Philadelphia, Detroit and Sacramento.

#### ***Why isn't LCA testing my drinking water for these compounds?***

At this time, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has not determined what the health risks are, if any, related to consuming water that contains these compounds in very small amounts. In addition, testing methods have not yet been standardized, nor do we have treatment technology available to remove pharmaceutical compounds from the water. Until this information is available, any testing we complete would be for information purposes only, as there is no recommended course of action for water utilities to take if pharmaceuticals are found in their water supplies.

#### ***Should I drink bottled water instead?***

It is important to keep in mind that public drinking water (tap water) and bottled water come from the same source – our environment. Bottled water companies typically follow the same safety standards for their products that public

*Every drop matters. Every customer counts.*

water suppliers must follow for tap water. In many cases, bottled water comes directly from the public water system and is placed in bottles for resale at grocery stores. This provides convenience and sometimes improves the taste of the water, but doesn't provide any additional safety protection over tap water.

***What is being done about pharmaceuticals in drinking water?***

The water community is committed to protecting public health. Water professionals at EPA and other professional organizations are researching the occurrence of these compounds in drinking water supplies and are researching what the health effects may be. LCA will continue to be involved in the process through our active participation in local and national water industry organizations, such as the American Water Works Association (AWWA), that are leading these efforts. If research shows an adverse health impact associated with these compounds in drinking water, EPA will add them to their Contaminant Candidate List to begin developing regulations to require water utilities to test and treat the water for these compounds.

***If pharmaceuticals are in the water, why don't you just treat the water to remove them? They can't be safe for human consumption, can they?***

The fact that a substance is detectable does not mean the substance is harmful to humans. To date, research throughout the world has not demonstrated an impact on human health from pharmaceuticals compounds in drinking water. It is important to keep in mind that where these compounds have been detected, it has been at very low levels. People regularly consume or expose themselves to products containing these compounds in much higher concentrations through medicines, food and beverages and other sources. The level in which they are found in source waters is very small in comparison. The cost to test for hundreds of possible compounds, and to develop treatment systems to remove them, would be enormous and unaffordable for most communities. More information is needed about the health risks associated with these compounds in drinking water before these decisions can be made.

***What can I do, and how can I learn more?***

Our water supply is a precious resource, and we all need to work together to protect it. The best and most cost-effective way to ensure safe water at the tap is to keep our source waters clean. The federal Office of National Drug Control Policy recommends not flushing prescription drugs down the toilet unless the accompanying patient information specifically instructs it is safe to do so. In addition, it is always a good idea to talk to your doctor about the drugs you are taking and ask whether they are necessary and whether the dosage you are taking is appropriate. You can learn more about pharmaceuticals in drinking water by visiting AWWA's consumer information page at [www.drinktap.org](http://www.drinktap.org), or by calling EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791.

You can always contact LCA for more information as well – we look forward to talking with citizens about their drinking water concerns!