

Tighter Rules on Arsenic in Water Saved Lives



MONDAY, Oct. 23, 2017 (HealthDay News) – U.S. government limits on arsenic in drinking water has likely averted hundreds of cases of lung and bladder cancer annually, a new study suggests.

After the Environmental Protection Agency introduced tighter limits on arsenic in public drinking water in 2006, there was a 17 percent decrease in levels of arsenic in the urine of people served by public water systems that complied with the rule, the researchers found.

Not only that, but there were an estimated 200 fewer cases of lung and bladder cancer a year after the tougher rules were put in place.

Levels of arsenic in the urine of people who used private wells did not change, according to the study published Oct. 23 in *The Lancet Public Health* journal.

Arsenic is a carcinogen that naturally occurs in drinking water across the United States. The study findings highlight the important role that government drinking water regulations play in reducing toxic exposures and protecting health, the researchers said.

“EPA regulation was associated with a significant decrease in urinary arsenic concentrations among Americans who use public water systems,” said study author Anne Nigra, from the

Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health in New York City.

However, private wells are not subject to regulation by the EPA.

“Levels of arsenic in private wells, estimated to provide water to roughly 45.5 million Americans, vary significantly throughout the U.S.A. Because of the cost of testing and treating contaminated water, private well water users remain inadequately protected against arsenic exposure in drinking water, especially residents of lower socioeconomic status,” Nigra said in a journal news release.

In fact, a government study published just last week estimated that 2 million private well users may be exposed to high levels of arsenic in their drinking water. High levels of arsenic have been linked to an increased risk for a broad range of cancers, including skin, lung, bladder, kidney and liver cancers, the researchers noted. It can also threaten the nervous system, respiratory function, heart health and the immune system.

“The findings are consistent with data from previous studies of the health benefits of reducing arsenic concentrations in drinking water,” Dr. Philip Landrigan, a professor at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City, wrote in an editorial that accompanied the latest study.

“They are also concordant with analyses of the benefits of interventions against air pollution, which have been shown produced major gains both for human health and the economy,” he wrote.

SOURCE: *The Lancet Public Health*, news release, Oct. 22, 2017

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