



guardians of drinking water quality
DRINKING WATER INSPECTORATE

Water storage tanks and cisterns

Is stored water safe to drink?

Modern house building practice is that drinking water in the home comes directly from the mains and only water for other domestic purposes (bathrooms, hot water, and central heating) is fed from a cold water storage tank located usually in the loft. Stored water is at greater risk of impaired quality than fresh water from the mains. That does **not** mean that stored water is harmful - but it must not be taken for granted and to be confident about stored water quality you need to check it out.

Do I have a water storage tank?

In modern homes with unvented heating systems, both hot and cold taps deliver water direct from supply at the pressure in the water company's main. These systems do not need a storage tank in the loft, and all cold tap water are likely to be supplied directly from the mains. In other houses, the kitchen cold tap is probably connected directly to the mains, whereas water in the bathrooms is more likely to come from a tank.

If you are not sure whether a tap delivers water direct from supply, your water company or a plumber can advise you. A quick check is to place a thumb over the tap outlet to "feel" the water pressure. Mains connected taps are usually of higher pressure than stored water taps.

What if I do have a storage tank?

Water from storage **can** be safe to drink, providing the cistern complies with the following criteria:

- is not too large, so the water in the tank is frequently replenished with fresh water (25 litres (5 gallons) per home is a guide);
- is flushed through with fresh water (by use of toilets and other appliances) after any period of time when the house has been unoccupied and the standing water may have become warm and stale;
- is made of approved materials (these are listed in the Water Fittings and Materials Directory, published by the Water Regulations Advisory Scheme). For more details see [here](#).
- has a lid which excludes light and is tightly fitting and securely fastened, so that birds, vermin, and dust cannot get in to the water;



- has vents, including overflow, that are screened so that insects and particles cannot get in;
- is insulated and in a cool place so that, ideally, the temperature does not exceed 20° C;
- is inspected annually and any deposits cleaned out and the tank disinfected annually. Cleaning is very important in order to remove debris which could provide a breeding ground for bacteria, including legionella;
- in large buildings or blocks of flats or social housing the tanks should be periodically sampled to check the quality and this can be arranged by landlords through your local council.

Be aware that stored water quality can deteriorate, especially, when:

- there is no lid on the storage tank;
- water is warm;
- too much water is stored and turnover is low;
- the tank or cistern is made or lined by with an unsuitable material;
- work on the tank is carried out by an unqualified person.

If I suspect a problem, who is responsible for putting it right?

Generally, the building owner is responsible for all aspects of the plumbing system and its maintenance, which includes the underground supply pipe from the boundary of the highway to the inside stopcock. New plumbing systems, and alterations and additions to older systems, must comply with regulations (known as the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations, 1999). Your local water company will carry out an inspection on request and advise you of any deficiencies that need to be rectified.

If you are a tenant then your landlord should be able to tell you if the drinking water is from storage, what inspection and maintenance has been carried out on the drinking water cistern, and what water quality samples have been taken and their analytical results. A landlord, or managing agent, should also be able to supply records of inspections and sampling results.

What if I suspect the water is unsafe?

Contact either your local water company or the environmental services team at your local council and explain your concerns to them. Depending on the exact situation, either the council or the water company will be able to carry out tests or inspect the plumbing and require the person responsible for the building water supply to make improvements. If you are the responsible person you will be given advice about what you need to do to rectify the problem.

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