

St. Bernard Parish Water System Frequently Asked Questions

On July 22, 2015, the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH) discovered the presence of the Naegleria fowleri amoeba in the St. Bernard Parish Water System.

I receive my drinking water from the St. Bernard Parish Water System. What does this mean for me?

Your water system has tested positive for the presence of Naegleria fowleri, an amoeba that can infect the brain only by entering your nose. These infections are extremely rare, but you should take precautions to prevent this amoeba from going up your nose.

Is my water safe to drink or use to bathe and cook?

Yes, based on the latest test results, the water from this system is safe to drink. It is also safe for most normal uses, but you should avoid getting water in your nose.

What should I do to protect my family and myself?

The most important thing you can do is to take steps to prevent water from going up your nose. The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have provided a list of precautionary measures that families can take to protect themselves from exposure to this amoeba. These precautionary measures are detailed on DHH's Water Facts page at www.dhh.la.gov/waterfacts.

What happens next?

The water system began a chlorine burn on the morning of July 23, which should help clear the pipes of biofilm, an organic material known to harbor and protect amoeba from disinfection. The water system will need to reach 1 mg/L throughout the system and then maintain that for 60 days. The Department will test the water system after that chlorine burn is done and will share those results with the public.

Is the St. Bernard Parish water system going to be penalized?

Not at this time. The water system is compliant with our requirements and has been working with the Department to further increase its chlorination to help combat the amoeba. As soon as we notified the parish of the problem, they began working with us to correct it.

How many people does the St. Bernard Parish water system serve?

This water system serves approximately 44,000 people.

How is DHH sure that water systems are meeting the chlorine residual requirements?

Water system operators are responsible for collecting samples for chlorine residuals to meet multiple safe drinking water regulations. DHH actively monitors monthly chlorine reports around the state to ensure they are meeting the required minimum chlorine residuals. In this case, most of the samples we took from the St. Bernard Parish Water System, including the one that tested positive for the amoeba, contained the required amount of total chlorine. One other sample taken from the water system that did not test positive for the amoeba tested below required levels of total chlorine. DHH is working with the water system to implement short and long-term solutions to this problem.

How was this amoeba able to be present in the water system?

We're investigating how the amoeba was able to be present in the sample we took, and there are multiple potential explanations. The sampling station we took the positive sample from was damaged, which may have directly or indirectly introduced the amoeba into the water system. It's also possible that biofilm, an organic material that harbors the amoeba and allows it to survive in the system, was present. The water system has taken steps, including the 60-day chlorine burn that began on July 23, to address the issue.

How often are water systems tested for Naegleria fowleri? How does DHH determine which water systems to test for Naegleria fowleri?

In response to the detections of Naegleria fowleri in 2013 in St. Bernard and Desoto parishes, DHH developed the ability to test water samples for Naegleria fowleri at our Public Health Laboratory. We also launched a surveillance program that allows us to test water systems when the weather is warm and the amoeba could be active. The water

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systems that are selected for monitoring as part of this surveillance effort are chosen based on differing source types, treatment processes, geographical locations, and compliance histories in order to obtain a broad view of water systems around the state.

How long does it take to test a water system for Naegleria fowleri?

It takes about 1 hour to collect one sample from the water system. Once collected, the sample(s) are taken to Public

Health Laboratory. It takes approximately 24 business days to complete analysis and obtain results from that sample.

Why does testing take 24 days?

Testing to detect the ameba are very detailed and lengthy. It involves growing the ameba and running two separate tests. The first portion of the test tells us if there are any amebas in the water. The second test uses DNA to confirm that the ameba in the water is or is not Naegleria fowleri.