NYC Tap Water

Where does New York City's drinking water come from?

New York City's drinking water comes directly from the rainfall that falls in the highly regulated and protected Catskill/Delaware and Croton Watersheds. The watersheds include 19 reservoirs and 3 controlled lakes, which hold up to a total of 550 billion gallons of water.

How does the water get to campus?

Around 1.1 billion gallons of drinking water moves through three aqueducts from the watershed into the city mostly via gravity, a process that can take up to 72 hours to reach city limits. The water travels through aqueducts, which are hundreds of miles of pipes and tunnels. The Catskill/Delaware and Croton watershed combined are around 1,600 square miles, which is larger than the state of Rhode Island. The water system is managed by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

Is NYC's drinking water treated?

NYC's drinking water supply is the largest unfiltered system in the U.S. This is possible because watershed's forests, swamps, and soils act as natural filters, removing pollutants. While unfiltered, the City's water is treated with ultraviolent radiation. It passes through large containers that hold ultraviolet lights that are encased in quartz tubes that work to destroy pathogens and bacteria. The water is also treated with very small amounts of chlorine to disinfect the water. Our water is tested daily and regularly, with over 2 million measurements collected each year.

What are the requirements to provide safe drinking water?

Adequate access to safe drinking water is required in schools and in workplaces per U.S. and State law, as well as, building codes. Potable means that the source of the water must meet the quality standards prescribed by the U.S Public Health Service; NYC's drinking water system meets these criteria through daily monitoring and controls. The New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) regulates and polices the watershed that surrounds and protects our reservoirs, and the water is tested more than half-a-million times a year at various points throughout the system. Additionally, the DEP adjusts the pH of the water to minimize corrosion and adds phosphoric acid to create a protective film on pipes to prevent the release of lead and other metals.

Conditions like cloudiness or brown water are temporary and should clear quickly after running the water for 30 seconds. While not harmful, the campus community should not drink obviously discolored water. Drinking water with an unusual milky appearance or off-taste should be reported via x5885, so we can follow up.

Should I be worried about exposure to lead in campus drinking water?

While lead in drinking water is a concern for everyone, it is especially harmful to small children. NYC Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) requires that all childcare centers provide documentation that water meets EPA criteria for lead (above the limit of 15 parts per billion). We test water quality at our childcare center periodically to ensure system-wide compliance with these requirements.

We work with the DEP, DOHMH and the Department of Education (DOE) to explore measures to minimize contamination of our potable water and to maximize the safety of everyone on campus.

What steps can I take to ensure my health and safety?

Community members should report water that is discolored or has an off odor or taste. Contact Facilities at x5885. Running the water for at least 30 seconds, until the water is noticeably colder, can also flush the pipes of any contaminants.

Using a water filter can improve water taste and, depending on the filter type, may remove lead potentially found in tap water. Be sure it is NSF International certified and is used and maintained according to manufacturer's recommendations.

Why should I drink tap water instead of bottled water?

While bottled water remains popular throughout the world, studies show that tap water is all around the healthier choice for our bodies, our wallet, and the planet.

Around 60 million disposable plastic bottles end up in landfills daily and would take thousands of years for them to decompose naturally. Millions of tons of plastics (estimated over 8,300) have been produced to date since its introduction in 1950, with 79% going to landfills (ScienceAdvances). Improperly disposed waste results in bottles and caps clogging storm drains and pipes and polluting water ways and oceans. Plastic bottles break down into microplastics, which make their way into our food supplies and our bodies. Furthermore, chemicals called phthalates, which are known to disrupt testosterone and other hormones, can leach from the container into the water over time and can contaminate animal and human food chains.

Choosing tap water over bottled water significantly reduces your carbon footprint, reduces your exposure to microplastics, and prevents plastic pollution.

Are there other benefits to drinking tap water?

Choosing tap water is not only a greener option; it is less expensive. Cost estimates suggest that foregoing bottled water could save you up to $2,000 a year.

Want to drink more water?

- BYOB! Make sure to have a re-usable bottle in hand.
- Use one of the 22 water bottle-filling stations on campus. Stations are located on the first floor (and on many 2nd or 3rd floors) of every building on campus!
- Using the BC Navigator app, you can easily locate a filling station! Choose the "Food & Drink" maps widget from the upper right hand dropdown menu.

Resource Links

https://www.nyc.gov/site/dep/water/drinking-water.page

https://www.nyc.gov/site/dep/water/lead-in-household-plumbing-faq.page

https://data.cityofnewyork.us/Environment/Lead-Service-Line-Location-Coordinates/bnkq-6un4

https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2011/07/29/maintaining-the-superiority-of-nyc%E2%80%99s-drinking-water/

https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.1700782