

# Is untreated river water safe to drink?

**On general public health grounds, water from any river is not recommended for household drinking or cooking.**

The Australian Drinking Water Guidelines state individual households should select the best quality source of water available to them.

If you do not have access to mains water, the best source of water is usually rainwater from roof collection (i.e. rainwater tanks), or in some cases, ground water (e.g. bores or wells). Ground water may not be suitable in some areas, and professional advice should be sought before using it.

River water (from any river) is not recommended. *By far the greatest risk from untreated river water comes from bacteria, viruses and parasites that may be in the water.* This is true of all untreated water sourced from rivers.

This risk comes mostly from river water being contaminated by human and animal faeces. This can be caused by native and farm animals near the river, septic tanks in the area, and agricultural and stormwater run-off.

It is always hard to know how clean river water is. Even when the chemical levels (both natural chemicals and introduced chemicals) are known to be safe, the microbial quality is questionable.

For example, rainfall can reduce the quality of water so much that treatment of the river-water by households is ineffective.

**Using river water should generally be a last resort.** If river water must be used, it should be treated by boiling or use of chlorine and/or filters.

Whatever your source of water is, be sure to keep your water collection system clean and maintain it well.

More information (including advice on rainwater tank management) is available from your local council or the DHHS website at [http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/peh/environmental\\_health/water\\_quality](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/peh/environmental_health/water_quality) or by contacting the Public and Environmental Health Service (phone 1800 671 738).