

Colour, taste and odour explained



Scottish Water
Trusted to serve Scotland

Scottish Water provides clear, fresh and high quality drinking water direct to your tap every day.

Your drinking water must meet strict legal quality standards set out in **The Public Water Supplies (Scotland) Regulations 2014**.

More than 99% of drinking water samples in Scotland meet the required standards.

If you notice any change or anything unusual about the appearance, taste or smell of your water please contact us and we will investigate it as quickly as possible.



How we sample

We regularly test drinking water at our treatment works, service reservoirs, and customers' taps. At larger treatment works, some checks are carried out continuously.

We also take extra samples when needed, for example after bursts, when new mains are installed, or when customers report a problem.

Why your water may be coloured

Water in Scotland often comes from rivers, lochs, and reservoirs, which can be naturally coloured by the surrounding land.

You may notice changes:

- After heavy rainfall
- At certain times of year
- During or after maintenance work

We treat all water before it reaches your tap and work to reduce this natural colour as much as possible. The amount removed depends on the type of treatment used and the quality of the raw water.

For more information on our treatment processes, please see Scottish Water Factsheet: **Water treatment explained**.



Causes of discoloured water

There can be several reasons for a change in the colour of your water. Here are some of the most common:

Brown or reddish water

In some parts of Scotland, water can sometimes look reddish-brown because it contains iron and manganese. This can come from:

- Natural soils and rocks
- Older water pipes

There are no known health concerns at the levels found in drinking water.

The standard limit is 200 micrograms per litre for iron and 50 micrograms per litre for manganese.

This limit is called the Prescribed Concentration or Value (PCV).

Your tap water can also pick up iron from older cast iron mains or from the plumbing inside your property.

We are continually replacing or repairing our pipes where needed. As a homeowner or property owner, you are responsible for the pipework inside your home and any underground pipes within your property boundary.

In the spring and summer months, in certain areas of Scotland, manganese may show up in your water as tiny brownish flakes or particles.

If you notice a change in the appearance of your water, please call our **Customer Helpline** on **0800 0778 778** and we will investigate.

White water

Some customers notice what is often called 'white water'. This happens when tiny air bubbles are released as water leaves the tap.

The bubbles rise to the surface, and the water clears on its own. If you pour a glass, you will usually see it clear from the bottom upwards.

Your water is still safe to drink. If it does not clear, please get in touch.

Blue water

Water can sometimes look slightly blue when you see it against a white background, such as in a bath.

This is normal and is often a sign that the water has very little natural colour in it. The same effect can sometimes be seen in glaciers.

Work in your area or changes in flow

Water can become temporarily discoloured if:

- Maintenance work is being carried out
- Water is redirected from another area
- There's a burst pipe or high demand (for example, firefighting)

These changes can disturb harmless deposits inside the water main and cause short-term discolouration.

What you can do

To help clear it, run your cold tap for a short time. If the problem continues, call our **Customer Helpline** on **0800 0778 778**.

For further guidance on bottle fed infants please refer to **Formula feeding: How to feed your baby safely – Publications – Public Health Scotland**.

Storage problems

If water from taps that are not connected directly to the mains looks discoloured or smells unusual, the cause may be a storage tank inside your property.

Make sure your storage tank has a close-fitting lid and is cleaned regularly.

If you are unsure, contact a registered plumber.

Washing

If your washing has been discoloured because of the water, repeat the wash without adding fabric softener.

If it is still discoloured then please get in touch with us and we will arrange to visit you.

Why your water sometimes tastes or smells different

Everyone experiences tastes differently, and perceptions can vary from person to person. Water from different areas can taste slightly different. This is usually because of the presence of natural minerals and metals in the supply, such as iron, copper, manganese, and zinc. Some people are more sensitive to tastes and smells and may notice changes in the water more.

A chlorine smell

A chlorine or 'swimming-pool' smell usually comes from the small amount of chlorine left in the water to keep it safe. This is often called the chlorine residual.



For more information on why we add chlorine to your water, please see Scottish Water Factsheet: **Chlorine explained.**

TCP (antiseptic) /medicinal taste

If you notice an antiseptic or medicinal taste to your tap water, there are several possible reasons for this. Chlorine is widely used to keep our water supplies safe and clean. Occasionally, when chlorine interacts with certain household materials or fittings, it can produce chemical compounds that give water a distinctive antiseptic or medicinal taste.

While these compounds are present in very small amounts and are not harmful, they can be quite noticeable. Materials that may contribute include tap washers, plastic kettles, washing machines, dishwashers, hoses connecting appliances to your plumbing, rubber anti-splash attachments, and plastic pipes. If you have concerns, checking these items may help identify the source of the taste.

A metallic taste

A metallic taste can happen when water picks up small traces of metals such as copper or iron. This may be more noticeable in larger buildings with long pipe runs.

Earthy/musty smell

Some customers describe this as a stale or pond-like smell. Common causes include:

- By-products from algae or harmless micro-organisms in raw water sources. Where we know this can happen, we treat the water using activated carbon or ozone.
- Long pipe runs inside large buildings

Earthy/musty tastes and odours can occur water has been left to stand for a long time or has been warmed in little used sections of plumbing.

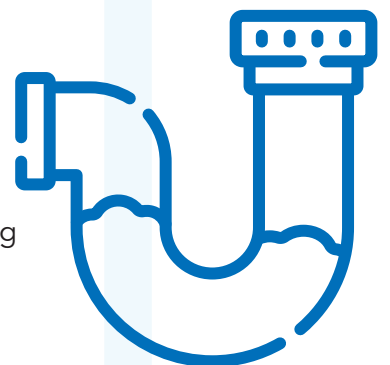
If you have any appliances (washing machine, dishwasher, fridge or outside taps) connected to the water main and your kitchen tap you should check they fitted with non-return valves. If they are not fitted, then they may draw stagnant water from the appliances back through to the kitchen tap which may give the tap water an unpleasant taste or odour.

How to play your part

Property owners and occupiers have an important role in helping to keep their drinking water safe. Under the Water Supply (Water Fittings) (Scotland) Byelaws 2014, internal plumbing systems should be properly designed, correctly installed, and well maintained so that they do not affect water quality.

In some cases, issues such as unused pipework, older storage systems, or unsuitable fittings within a property can contribute to changes in the taste or smell of the water. Keeping your plumbing system in good condition helps protect both water quality and your health.

If you notice ongoing taste or odour issues, it may be helpful to consider whether your internal plumbing could be a cause. A qualified plumber can provide advice and support where needed.



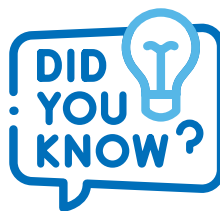
What happens if you have a water quality concern

If you get in touch with us about a water quality concern, we'll first check whether it could be linked to any work happening on the network.

If needed, we'll arrange for one of our customer representatives to visit your property and investigate it for you. They will usually begin by checking the water at your kitchen tap, or at the point where water first enters your property.

If we do find a water quality issue, we may carry out more checks depending on the problem. This may include:

- Flushing the water main to improve the water
- Checking chlorine levels on site to see if they are normal
- Taking samples based on the type of issue you reported



Your drinking water is tested regularly to make sure it meets strict quality standards – but natural changes in source water or pipework can sometimes affect its colour, taste or smell.

Sample Results

If our representative takes samples, they will be sent to our laboratory for testing.

Within 14 days, a scientist from our public health team will send you a detailed response explaining the results.

For more information visit:

www.scottishwater.co.uk/factsheets

Keeping up to date and getting in touch

Find out more about Scottish Water, our services, and keep up to date with what we are doing in your area:



Customer.scottishwater.co.uk/ReportAProblem



0800 0778 778 (free 24/7)*



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www.scottishwater.co.uk

We're here for you

For customers with medical, disability, caring, or communications needs, our free Priority Services Register offers extra support during water disruptions.

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www.scottishwater.co.uk/Priority

* We record all calls for quality and training purposes.