

# **DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES**

Public Health Service Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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Subject:	Epi-Aid Trip Report: An assessment of health concerns in a community exposed to chloramine treated tap water in Vermont, 2006–2007 (Epi-2007-054).
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#### **INTRODUCTION**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires all public water supplies (PWSs) using surface water to disinfect the water provided to their customers. In addition, all PWSs are required to maintain a residual disinfectant throughout the water distribution system to control bacterial re-growth. PWSs have several options for methods to disinfect drinking water, including filtration or chemical disinfection with chlorine or chloramine. Because chloramine produces fewer of the drinking water disinfectant is becoming more common. Chloramine is produced by combining chlorine and ammonia in water and, under the usual conditions of water and wastewater chlorination, monochloramine is the principal end product and disinfectant. Chloramine has been approved for use by the EPA; however, data gaps remain about the potential health effects of using chloramine for large scale water disinfection.

Chloramine has been used since before World War II for drinking water treatment. Its most frequent current use is as a residual disinfectant; its use allows systems to maintain the required detectable residual throughout the distribution system while simultaneously controlling regulated disinfection byproducts (total trihalomethanes (TTHM) and five haloacetic acids (HAA5)). There is also evidence that chloramine may control biofilm in the distribution system more effectively than other residual disinfectants (see EPA's website for information about chloramine disinfection of drinking water: http://www.epa.gov/safewater/disinfection/chloramine/index.html).

#### BACKGROUND

On April 10, 2006, Vermont's Champlain Water District (CWD) changed its drinking water treatment process to use chloramine rather than chlorine as the secondary disinfectant. CWD's use of chloramine is consistent with use in systems across the

country. This change affected Chittenden County (12 municipal systems that serve approximately 68,000 people). Between April 2006 and May 2007, the Vermont Department of Health Agency of Human Services and the Champlain Water District received approximately 74 calls from community members reporting a wide range of health symptoms, including upper respiratory symptoms, complaints of watery eyes and nose, scratchy throat, gastrointestinal ailments, skin rashes, and "itchy skin." The Division of Environmental Hazards and Health Effects (EHHE) of the National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH) was asked to investigate community concerns regarding exposure to chloramine treated tap water.

#### **METHODS**

On September 25, 2007 a seven person team from CDC and the EPA arrived in Burlington, Vermont. The team from CDC consisted of two Epidemic Intelligence Service Officers, a Senior Epidemiologist, and a Medical Student. The team from the EPA consisted of the Associate Director of Drinking Water from EPA's Region 1 in Boston, MA; and a Water Engineer, and an Environmental Science and Policy Specialist from the Office of Water/Ground Water and Drinking Water Standards and Risk Management Division in Washington, DC. The objective of the trip was to gather information to better understand community concerns about symptoms believed to be associated with exposure to tap water disinfected with chloramine.

Tuesday afternoon, 9/25, the CDC team met with the Vermont Department of Health and reviewed a questionnaire prepared by CDC to characterize symptoms which people reported to be associated with chloramine exposure.

On Wednesday 9/26, there was a full day of meetings that allowed an organized venue for various groups to express their concerns about chloramine exposure. Our meetings started with the Commissioner of Health, Commissioner of Environmental Conservation, and Health Department staff. We then met with the Champlain Water District senior staff and engineers, and then the State's Senator and local Representatives. In the afternoon on Wednesday, we met with advocacy groups: People Concerned about Chloramine (PCAC) and Vermonters for a Clean Environment. On Thursday morning 9/27, we toured the water treatment plant to view their drinking water treatment process. Home visits and telephone interviews were conducted from Wednesday afternoon through Friday afternoon. We returned to Atlanta on Friday evening, 9/28.

The media requested permission to attend all of the meetings scheduled for Wednesday. They were provided the opportunity to interview representatives from each group involved in the meetings and to record the meeting with the advocacy groups.

Group	Stated Objective for Participation in Meeting
People Concerned about Chloramine	To have chloramine removed from drinking water
Vermonters for a Clean Environment	To have chloramine removed from drinking water
State Legislators	Wanted to understand all issues
Champlain Water District	Explain their water treatment process, changes in the process, and their concerns

#### HOME VISITS AND TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

#### Participant inclusion criteria

Eligible participants included all individuals residing in Chittenden County, Vermont, who had contacted the Champlain Water District or were identified in local media since April 10, 2006 and reported health effects they believed were associated with exposure to tap water.

#### Questionnaire

A questionnaire was prepared which focused on respondents' health, health of their families, and tap water usage (Appendix A). We interviewed 50 individuals either by telephone or during a home visit. A water engineer was part of each team visiting homes, and they examined point-of-entry and/or point-of-use water filtration systems in the residences.

#### Statistical Analysis

We entered and analyzed data in EPI Info 3.3.2. Descriptive statistics are presented.

#### Quality Control of data collection

#### Self-reported symptoms

This investigation was subject to biases as discussed below and any data analyses should be interpreted with caution. The respondents to this questionnaire were a convenience sample and were not examined by a medical care provider to verify the symptoms they reported.

#### Local influence

It was reported to field investigators, that the local chapter of People Concerned about Chloramine (PCAC) had implemented a mass media campaign prior to our arrival. This campaign distributed approximately 10,000 flyers by going door to door and approaching individuals "on the street" and in grocery stores. One report stated an individual with visible skin problems was approached by a member of PCAC in the grocery store and was told the source of their skin problem was the chloramine in the tap water. PCAC has also utilized the local press and public radio spots to mobilize an anti-chloramine campaign. This campaign started prior to April 2006 and continues today. PCAC's flyers and internet website have identified symptoms they claim are associated with the change in water disinfection, including furry tongues, gastrointestinal upset, dermatitis, and respiratory ailments.

Field investigators observed PCAC members coaching survey respondents (many of whom are PCAC members) prior to the meeting on Wednesday. In one case, a PCAC

member was present during the home visit and prompted the respondent to provide specific answers to our questions.

Based on these influences and biases these results can not be interpreted as representing the rates of symptoms, health conditions, or complaints of the overall community.

#### RESULTS

All interviews were conducted between September 26 and October 10, 2007. At first 74 individuals were contacted by the health department and asked if they would participate in the questionnaire and or home visit. Of those 74 individuals 49 were interviewed. At the request of PCAC the deadline for interviews was extended. This extension allowed PCAC time to contact their membership, requesting their participation in the questionnaire and provided the Vermont Department of Health the opportunity to continue interviewing individuals who wanted to participate in the questionnaire. One person contacted the health department following the extension of the deadline. Of the 50 individuals interviewed, 46 met the inclusion criteria described above. Of the four excluded: three stated their symptoms were not caused by the water and one individual had no symptoms but called because they were concerned. The 46 individuals interviewed represented 36 households. The median age of participants was 55 years (range: 2-88 years) and 29 (63%) were female. Our questionnaire inquired about 11 symptoms and participants were asked to identify if they had experienced any of these symptoms (Table 1). In addition we asked participants what activities, if any, triggered their symptoms (Table 2).

Twenty-five (54%) of the participants stated they had preexisting chronic health conditions. Of these, 6 reported more than one preexisting chronic health condition. The chronic health conditions and the number of participants reporting each condition were as follows: allergies (9), dermatologic problems (6), arthritis (5), asthma (4), diabetes (3), auto immune disorders (3), cardiac history (3), respiratory (2), cancer (2) and other (6). Thirty two (70%) of the participants sought medical attention for their symptoms and 8 (17%) of these individuals received a diagnosis. The diagnoses reported and the numbers of participants with each diagnosis were as follows: psoriasis/eczema (5), fluid in the lungs (1), "writer's rash" (1), and surface eye irritation (1).

We also asked study participants if they had changed their source of drinking water or changed how they used their water. Of the 46 participants: 34 (74%) reported they have changed their tap water habits. These changes included showering outside the home (outside water district's domain); using bottled water for drinking, bathing and or both; lowering temperature of water, or shortening duration of exposure. Twenty three (50%) reported they filter or purify their household water. There were 4 (17%) who reported they use a point of entry filtration system and 16 (70%) who use a point of use filter in their home (such as a carbon filter) and 3 (13%) did not answer the question.

Of the 34 participants who reported they have changed their tap water use habits, 23 (67.6%) reported their symptoms improved or had gone away after they changed their water use. Four (11.8%) reported no change, 3 (8.8%) reported they did not know, and 4 (11.8%) did not answer the question.

Symptoms	Number of people reporting symptom	%
Dry, flaky, or itchy skin	36	78.3
Rash	28	60.9
Eye irritation	23	50
Cough	20	43.5
Joint aches	14	30.4
Breathing troubles	14	30.4
Skin pain, numbness or tingling	10	21.7
Diarrhea	10	21.7
Headache	9	19.6
Anything else	8	17.8
Fever	2	4.3

Table 1. Symptoms reported by 46 residents of Chittenden County, VT which they believed were associated with exposure to chloramine treated tap water, September and October 2007.

Table 2. Activities reported to be associated with symptoms for the 46 residents of Chittenden County, VT who reported symptoms, September and October 2007.

Symptoms	Sho	Shower		Bath		Drank		Washed Dishes	
	Ν	%	Ν	%	Ν	%	Ν	%	
Dry flaky itchy skin (N=36)	25	69.4	5	13.9	3	8.3	4	11.1	
Rash (N=28)	20	71.4	4	14.3	4	14.3	2	7.1	
Eye irritation (N=23)	17	73.9	3	13	1	4.3	0	0	
Cough (N=20)	8	40	1	5	5	25	0	0	

#### ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY OBSERVATIONS

#### CWD treatment and operational practices

Based on information provided by CWD staff, CWD operations are consistent with good operational practices for drinking water treatment. Chloramine dosage, chlorine:ammonia ratio, and pH are near the median for national use. CWD's chloramine concentration of 1.8-2.3 mg/L at its distribution system entry point is well below the maximum residual disinfectant level (MRDL) of 4.0 mg/L (with compliance determined as an annual average); actual exposure for consumers from water delivered by the distribution system will be less. It is important to note that the MRDL for chloramine was set at the MRDL goal (MRDLG); MRDLG was set at a level at which no known or anticipated human health effects occur, with an adequate margin of safety, as is required under the Safe Drinking Water Act amendments.

CWD has conducted additional monitoring beyond that required for compliance determination in order to better understand and control their treatment and distribution processes. CWD has measured no increase in lead levels; this is probably due to their careful switch from chlorine to chloramine as the residual disinfectant. This is part of the system's proactive compliance strategy (preventing violations) rather than a reactive compliance strategy (responding only after violations).

#### Observations made during visits to individual households

An EPA staff member was included in each CDC team that visited individual households, to evaluate any treatment that homeowners may have installed. Teams found a mixture of no

treatment, treatment to reduce chloramine level, and treatment that addressed issues other than chloramines. There was a mixture of point-of-entry (whole house) and point-of-use (faucet or showerhead) treatment units. Based on these visits, there do not appear to be any supportable engineering conclusions that can be made concerning a link between treatment and exposure/symptoms.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Not having baseline data, the post hoc analysis is difficult especially since there are strong biases with this data. Information provided by this questionnaire should be utilized to explore the design of future prospective studies eliminating biases and allowing for a baseline understanding of the symptoms that pre-exist in the community.
- 2. CDC and EPA should work with State and local agencies to develop the next steps in addressing the issue of community concerns about chloramine-treated tap water.

#### **OMB CLEARANCE**

This was not a research study.

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#### **Appendix A: Questionnaire**

## Self-reported Symptoms and Exposure to Chloramine-Treated Tap Water, Vermont Ouestionnaire

#### INTRODUCTION SCRIPT

### **VT State Health Department Staff**

Hello, may I speak with \_\_\_\_\_\_? My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_, and I am calling from the VT State Health Department. We are working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention looking into reported symptoms related to exposure to chloramine treated tap water. We received your name from the Champlain Water District because you have reported symptoms. We would like to ask you some questions about your health, the health of your family, and your tap water usage. Your answers will help us understand what symptoms have been reported since the Champlain Water District switched over to disinfecting their water with chloramine. The questions will take about 20 minutes. May we go ahead now with the questionnaire?

If no, is there a convenient time when I can call you back?

Day:	Time:	AM / PM
Telephone:		

## **CDC Staff**

CDC Staff Hello, may I speak with \_\_\_\_\_? My name is \_\_\_\_\_? and I am calling from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. We are working with the VT Department of Health looking into reported symptoms related to exposure to chloramine treated tap water. We received your name from the Champlain Water District because you have reported symptoms. We would like to ask you some questions about your health, the health of your family, and your tap water usage. Your answers will help us understand what symptoms have been reported since the Champlain Water District switched over to disinfecting their water with chloramine. The questions will take about 20 minutes. May we go ahead now with the questionnaire?

If no, is there a convenient time when I can call you back?

Day:	Time:	AM / PM

Telephone:

#### Self-reported Symptoms and Exposure to Chloramine-Treated Tap Water, Vermont Questionnaire

Date:

Time interview began: \_\_:\_\_ AM / PM Interviewers Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

**1.0** First, I would like to confirm that you contacted someone to report that you or someone you know had symptoms. Did you contact any person or organization to report these symptoms?

- ∐ No □ Yes
- Don't know
- Refused

IF NO. OK, we are interested in talking with the people who contacted someone to report symptoms. I am sorry to bother you. Thank you for your time.

IF YES:

2.0

 1.0a
 Can you please tell me who you contacted? (check all that apply)

 Champlain Water District

 Vermont Department of Health

 People Concerned about chloramine

 Health care professional

 Health care professional

 Emergency room

 Newspaper

 Radio or TV

 Political representative

 Don't know

 Refused

 Other, explain

Now I would like you to think back to when you contacted <CONTACT> to report these symptoms. Then, I would like to ask you a couple of questions about that call. Are you ready?

**1.0b** What prompted you to contact <CONTACT>?

Were □ Sel	you calling for yourself or for someone else?
Soi Soi	neone else
If you	were calling for someone else, what is their name and relationship to you?
1.0d1	Name:
1.0d2	Relationship:
Coul	l I please interview that person / May we continue with the interview?
	d I please interview that person / May we continue with the interview? hild, ask parent if you can continue on with interview)
(If cl	
(If cl □ Ye	nild, ask parent if you can continue on with interview)
(If cl □ Ye □ No	nild, ask parent if you can continue on with interview) s, interviewed other person
(If cl □ Ye □ No □ No	<b>hild, ask parent if you can continue on with interview)</b> s, interviewed other person refused

whether or not you have the symptom now and what activities trigger these symptoms. Is that clear?

OK, can you tell me your symptoms?

2.0a Symptom	2.0b Start Date	2.0c End Date	2.0d Have it now?	2.0e Do any of the following activities trigger these symptoms?
			☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Don't know ☐ Refused	<ul> <li>Washing dishes</li> <li>Doing laundry</li> <li>Using dishwasher</li> <li>Showering</li> <li>Taking a bath</li> <li>Using hot tub</li> </ul>
			☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Don't know ☐ Refused	<ul> <li>Other Explain</li> <li>Washing dishes</li> <li>Doing laundry</li> <li>Using dishwasher</li> <li>Showering</li> <li>Taking a bath</li> </ul>
			☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Don't know ☐ Refused	<ul> <li>Using hot tub</li> <li>Other Explain</li> <li>Washing dishes</li> <li>Doing laundry</li> <li>Using dishwasher</li> <li>Showering</li> <li>Taking a bath</li> </ul>
			☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Don't know ☐ Refused	<ul> <li>Using hot tub</li> <li>Other Explain</li> <li>Washing dishes</li> <li>Doing laundry</li> <li>Using dishwasher</li> <li>Showering</li> <li>Taking a bath</li> </ul>
			☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Don't know ☐ Refused	<ul> <li>Using hot tub</li> <li>Other Explain</li> <li>Washing dishes</li> <li>Doing laundry</li> <li>Using dishwasher</li> <li>Showering</li> <li>Taking a bath</li> <li>Using hot tub</li> </ul>
				Other Explain

# 3.0 In addition to the symptoms you told me about, I am now going to read you a list of symptoms.

Did you have the following symptom?	Did it get worse when you:	Before April 2006 when you (activity) did you have this symptom?
3.0a Cough	Washed dishes	
☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Don't know ☐ Refused	<ul> <li>Did laundry</li> <li>Used dishwasher</li> <li>Showered</li> <li>Took a bath</li> <li>Used hot tub</li> <li>Drank</li> </ul>	☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Don't know ☐ Refused
3.0b     Fever?       No     Yes       Don't know     Refused	<ul> <li>Cooked</li> <li>Other Explain</li> <li>Washed dishes</li> <li>Did laundry</li> <li>Used dishwasher</li> <li>Showered</li> <li>Took a bath</li> <li>Used hot tub</li> <li>Drank</li> </ul>	☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Don't know ☐ Refused
3.0b1 How High	Cooked	
3.0c Headache?	<ul> <li>Other Explain</li> <li>Washed dishes</li> <li>Did laundry</li> <li>Used dishwasher</li> <li>Showered</li> <li>Took a bath</li> <li>Used hot tub</li> <li>Drank</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>No</li> <li>Yes</li> <li>Don't know</li> <li>Refused</li> </ul>
<b>3.0d</b> Joint aches?         No       Yes         Don't know       Refused	<ul> <li>Cooked</li> <li>Other Explain</li> <li>Washed dishes</li> <li>Did laundry</li> <li>Used dishwasher</li> <li>Showered</li> <li>Took a bath</li> <li>Used hot tub</li> <li>Drank</li> <li>Cooked</li> </ul>	☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Don't know ☐ Refused
<ul> <li><b>3.0e Breathing troubles?</b></li> <li>No</li> <li>Yes</li> <li>Don't know</li> <li>Refused</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Other Explain</li> <li>Washed dishes</li> <li>Did laundry</li> <li>Used dishwasher</li> <li>Showered</li> <li>Took a bath</li> <li>Used hot tub</li> <li>Drank</li> <li>Cooked</li> </ul>	☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Don't know ☐ Refused
3.0f Rash?	Other       Explain	<ul> <li>No</li> <li>Yes</li> <li>Don't know</li> <li>Refused</li> </ul>

Did you have th	he following	Did it get worse when you:	Before April 2006 when you
symptom?	-	?	(activity) did you have this symptom?
3.0g Dry, fl	akey, or itchy skin?	Washed dishes	
		Did laundry	🗌 No
No		Used dishwasher	Yes
Yes		Showered	Don't know
Don't know		Took a bath	Refused
Refused		Used hot tub	
		Drank	
		Other Explain	
3.0h Skin p	ain, numbness or	Washed dishes	
tinglin		Did laundry	No
8	9.	Used dishwasher	Yes
No		Showered	Don't know
Yes		$\Box$ Took a bath	Refused
$\Box$ Don't know		Used hot tub	
Refused		Drank	
Refused			
		Other Explain	
3.0i Diarrh	1699	Washed dishes	
J.01 Diairin	ica.	Did laundry	No
🗌 No		Used dishwasher	Yes
Yes		Showered	$\square$ Don't know
$\square$ Don't know		Took a bath	
		Used hot tub	Kelused
Keiuseu		Drank	
2.0° E		Other Explain	
3.0j Eye irı	ritation?	Washed dishes	
		Did laundry	
No No		Used dishwasher	Yes
Yes		Showered	$\Box$ Don't know
Don't know		Took a bath	Refused
Refused		Used hot tub	
		Drank	
		Other Explain	
3.0k Anythi	ing else?	Washed dishes	
<b>—</b>		Did laundry	No
No		Used dishwasher	Yes
Yes		Showered	Don't know
Don't know		Took a bath	Refused
Refused		Used hot tub	
		Drank	
		Cooked	
		Other Explain	
☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Refu		ntion for any of the symptoms we just	talked about?
Commer			

IF NO go to 5.0

IF YE	S:	
	4.0a	Where did you go? (check all that apply)  Primary Care Provider  Emergency Department Urgent care Alternative health care provider Other Explain
	4.0b	Were you hospitalized for this condition?  Yes No Refused Don't know 4.0b1 If yes, when?
	4.0c	Did you receive a diagnosis?   No   Yes   Refused   Don't know   4.0c1 If yes, what was the diagnosis?
5.0	<b>show</b> <ul> <li>No</li> <li>Yes</li> <li>Refi</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>ave heard that people have stopped using their tap water for certain activities, like ering. Have you changed your tap water use habits?</li> <li>aused and are the stopped using their tap water use habits?</li> <li>5.0a If yes, can you please explain?</li></ul>
6.0	☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Ref	u filter or purify your household water?
	6.0a	If yes, do you have a point-of-entry filter, that is one that serves your whole house or a point-of-use filter, that is, a filter just for your drinking water? Point-of-entry filter Point-of-use filter 6.0a1 IF POINT-OF-ENTRY (serves your whole house) Can you tell me what kind of point-of-entry system you use? Carbon filter Water softener Ultraviolet treatment Reverse osmosis Other Describe Refused Don't know

6.0a2	IF POINT-OF-USE (just for your drinking water)
	Can you tell me what kind of point-of-use treatment system you use?

Carafe filter			
Faucet-mounted filter			
Counter-top filter			
Under-sink filter			
Refrigerator filter			
Other			
Describe			
Refused			
Don't know			
_			
6.0a2a	What type of treatment is the point-of-use system?		
0.0a2a			
	Carbon filter		
	Ultraviolet treatment		
	Reverse osmosis		
	Distiller		
	Other		
	Describe		
	Refused		

# 6.0a3 What is the name of your filter and name of the company that manufactured your filter?

- Access business Group LLV makers of eSpring products
  Culligan International Co.
  Cuno Inc makers of Aqua-Pure
  Everpure LLC
  Japin International Inc.
  Multi-Pure
  Paragon Water Systems, Inc.
  Rainsoft Division of Aquin makers of Hydrefiner
  Selecto Scientific, Inc
  Shurflo Pump Manufacturing Co.
  Sta-Rite Industries
  Other
  Describe \_\_\_\_
- 7.0 Are you on municipal tap water, that is, do you get your water from the Champlain Water District?

Y es
Refused

Don't know

IF NO:

Can you tell me the source of your tap water?

#### 7.0a Have your symptoms improved or gone away since you changed your water use?

No
Yes
Refused
Don't know

Now I am going to ask you a few questions about your general health.

8.0	Do you have any chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, skin conditions, asthma, allergies or anything else? No Yes Refused Don't know		
	8.0a	If yes, what are they?	
	8.0b	When were you diagnosed with this / these conditions? Date:	
Now ]	have a	few questions about you.	
9.0	How o	old are you?	
10.0	🗌 Male	What is your sex?  Male Female	
11.0	Is ther	Is there anything else related to your chloramine concern that you think I should know about?	

That was the last question. Thank you for taking the time to answer our questions.

If you are interested in the results of this questionnaire and additional information on water disinfection, please refer to the Vermont Department of Health website at <u>http://healthvermont.gov/enviro/water/chloramine.aspx</u>