

Troubleshooting tastes and odors in your drinking water

The steps below may help you resolve your taste or odor concern and determine if you need to report your concern to the water department.

Step 1: Compare hot and cold water.

- **If only the hot water has an odor or taste:** The water heater or hot water plumbing in your home may be the source of the taste/odor. They may need maintenance. Odors may also rise from your sink drain when they are hit with water from your faucet (see Step 2).
- **If both hot and cold are exhibiting taste or odor:** Continue to Step 2.

Step 2: Obtain a clean glass, fill it with the affected water, move into another unaffected area, and check to see if the taste or odor is still present.

- **If the taste or odor is not present when you move into another room:** The issue is most likely your sink drain trap or garbage disposal. It is recommended to clean your sink drain with bleach or vinegar. If a drain odor persists throughout your entire home, the issue may be due to a sewer issue in your home or on your street.
- **If the taste or odor is still present when you move into another room:** Continue to Step 3.

Step 3. Inspect every faucet inside and outside of your home.

- **If the taste or odor is only present at some faucets, not all:** The plumbing in your home is likely causing the taste or odor. Remove faucet aerators or screens and clean them. You may also bring in fresh water from the water main (pipe) by turning all faucets on for a few minutes. If your home has older plumbing, it is likely to have an odor or taste on the first flush attempt.
- **If flushing water through your faucets does not improve the taste or odor:** Follow the troubleshooting steps below to address specific tastes or odors.

Sulfur/rotten egg taste or odor

Bacteria in sink drains or heater issues are often the culprit behind a rotten egg or sulfur smell in drinking water. Try cleaning your sink drain trap or garbage disposal with bleach or vinegar. Additionally, you may try comparing the hot and cold sides of the faucet. If the smell only occurs while running hot water, you may need to service your water heater.

Chlorine taste or odor

Tampa's drinking water is treated to produce high-quality drinking water that meets all federal and state drinking water regulations. The Water Department primarily uses chloramine (ammonia added to chlorine) to disinfect the water. However, we switch to chlorine disinfection several times a year, usually in the winter and summer. Chlorine is a strong disinfectant that kills bacteria, helping ensure that the water remains safe to drink as it travels through the water mains and service lines to your tap. This temporary change in disinfection method lasts for three weeks at a time. We work closely with the Florida Department of Health (FDOH) to ensure that we comply with EPA guidelines for using chlorine and chloramine to disinfect Tampa's drinking water.

How to reduce the taste/odor of chlorine:

- Run the tap for a few minutes before using.

- Fill a pitcher of water and let it sit for several hours to allow any residual chlorine to evaporate.
- Consider installing a carbon filter on kitchen/bathroom faucets or shower heads or replacing existing filters with new ones.

Earthy taste or odor

When we are experiencing a lack of rainfall combined with increasing daytime temperatures, we sometimes also experience algae bloom in our reservoir that temporarily affects the taste and odor of Tampa's drinking water. While the resulting taste and odor are earthy and unpleasant, the water remains safe to drink while the algae bloom is being treated to bring it under control. Drawing tap water into storage containers and chilling the water in the refrigerator prior to use can help reduce the unpleasant taste and odor.

Metallic or bitter

Metallic and bitter tastes are often due to old iron pipes inside homes. Remove and clean aerator screens and run faucets for one to two minutes to see if the taste or odor clears.

Water Softener

This is another issue that can result from a lack of maintenance and/or other issues with a home water softener. Changing your water softener from normal to "bypass" may help the undesired odor or taste go away. If it does, this means you likely have an issue with your water softener.

Source: <https://www.tampa.gov/water/faq>

Source: <https://www.portland.gov/water/report-water-quality-issues/taste-or-odor-issues>