

City of Monroe

Water Resources Department

Discolored Water FAQs

What are possible causes for discoloration in drinking water?

Certain operations and maintenance activities in the City water system can cause discoloration of drinking water. Sudden discoloration may be due to activity that changes the direction or rate of flow in the City water main, such as the use of a fire hydrant or water main break in your area. Discoloration can also be due to household plumbing or activities, after periods of low water use in the home, or as a result of sediment in your hot water tank.

A few of the most common are:

- **Brown/Rusty** – Water main breaks, firefighting activities, and extremely high system demand may increase the velocity at which water travels through water mains. If the water's velocity becomes great enough, iron and manganese sediment lying on the bottom of the mains may be stirred up, resulting in discolored water. During such discolored water episodes, your water continues to meet all State and federal drinking water standards for public health safety.



- **Milky/Cloudy** – The water in the pipes is pressurized which helps to get the water to your home. Water under pressure holds more air than water that is not pressurized. Once the water comes out of your faucet, the water is no longer under pressure and the air bubbles are released. As a result, bubbles of air can sometimes cause the water to appear cloudy or milky. The cloudiness is typically temporary and clears up after sitting for a short time. Air can also result from certain system repairs or flushing. These conditions are not a public health concern.

If my water is discolored, does it mean it is unsafe to drink?

Not necessarily. Discoloration alone does not make water unsafe to drink. However, the water may be unappealing, so we recommend that you wait until it clears before drinking it. The water may sometimes clear on its own, or may require the City to perform certain activities. To start, try running cold water for a few minutes to see if it is clearing or still discolored. If the water does not clear, let it sit for 1 to 2 hours and then run the cold tap again. Sometimes it might take longer for the water to clear. Discoloration may cause some individuals to choose bottled water over tap water until the water clears up. From a public health standpoint, color is generally considered an aesthetic issue rather than a public health issue. If discoloration does not clear up in a reasonable time, and you have a water concern, we can be reached at (704) 282-4601, 24 hours a day.

What can I do in my home to prevent the discoloration?

Household plumbing and activities can affect your water's appearance. Some things you can do to reduce or prevent the discoloration are:

- If it has been a while since you have used the water, let it run. It should clear after flushing the faucet.
- If the discoloration only occurs with the hot water, flush your hot water tank. Hot water dissolves contaminants and may contain metals, sediment, and bacteria that buildup in the water heater. Flushing your hot water tank may help by clearing out the sediment in the bottom of the tank. (Note: Hot water increases the rate of corrosion in plumbing, consult a plumber for safety precautions.) Also, never drink or cook with hot water, use water from the cold water faucet.
- If you have a home filter system or refrigerator water filter, routinely replace water filter cartridges. Bacteria and metals can build up in the filter cartridges. Be sure to follow manufacturer's instructions.

What do I do if I am concerned about discoloration in my water?

If you are concerned about discolored water or the safety of your water, call (704) 282-4601 to report it, 24 hours a day. We encourage you to visit our website (www.monroenc.org) for water information and links to more information.

What is the pink film on my surfaces?

A pink film or residue on bathroom and kitchen surfaces generally does not indicate a problem with water quality. In fact, the pink residue is likely the result of airborne bacteria present in the home that produces a pinkish or dark gray film on surfaces that are routinely moist. Such surfaces include toilet bowls, showerheads, sink drains, and tiles. Some people have also noted that the pink residue appears in their pet's water bowl, which causes no apparent harm to the pet and is easily cleaned off. Many experts agree that the bacteria that causes this pink film is most likely *Serratia Marcesens*, a bacteria which is found naturally in soil, food, and in animals. *Serratia*, which produce a characteristic red pigment, thrive on moisture, dust, and phosphates and need almost nothing to survive. These bacteria were thought to be harmless until recently, when it was discovered that, in some people, *Serratia marcesens* is a cause of urinary tract infections, wound infections, and pneumonia.

Where does black mold come from?

Molds are living organisms that can grow on almost any surface and only requires dampness and a food source to grow. It is an airborne mold spore that are naturally occurring in our climate. Spores can enter your home through doorways, vents, windows, etc.... It is impractical to eliminate all indoor molds, but you can keep the mold growth in check by keeping humidity levels between 40% to 60%, promptly fixing leaky roofs, windows and pipes, ventilating shower, laundry, and cooking areas, drying areas of standing water, and using a non-abrasive cleaning solution with bleach in areas where mold is growing. Black mold on surfaces does not indicate a problem with your drinking water.

How do I get rid of the pink residue or black mold?

The best solution to these problems is regularly clean the involved areas to keep them free from bacteria. Chlorine based compounds work best, but keep in mind that abrasive cleaners may scratch fixtures, making them more susceptible to bacterial growth. Chlorine bleach can be used periodically to disinfect the toilet and help eliminate the occurrence of pink residue and mold. By keeping bathtubs and sinks wiped down and dry, the formation and growth can be avoided. Remembering to regularly clean the faucet aerators using a mild bleach solution also helps to prevent the appearance of both pink residue and black mold.