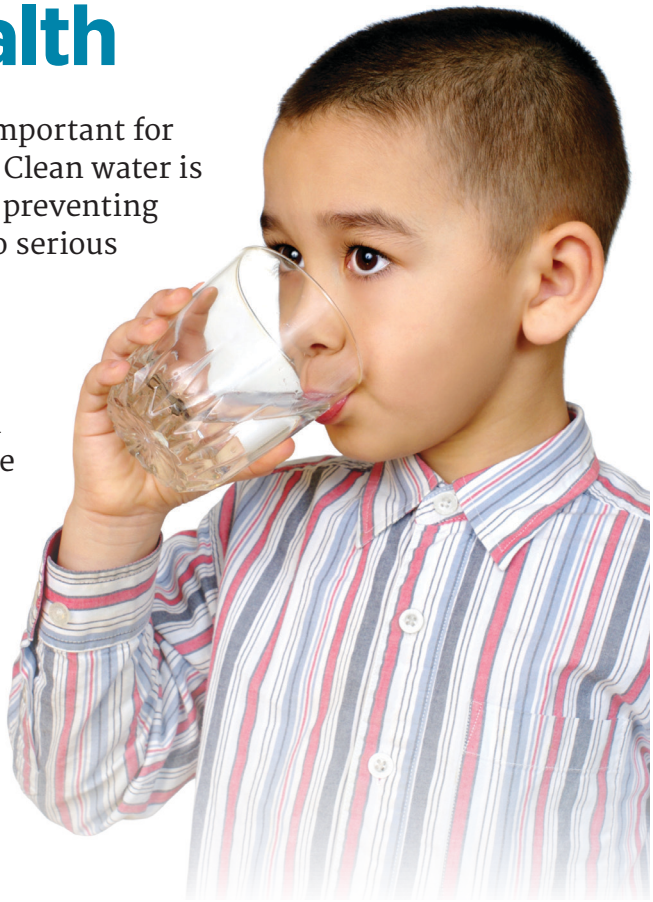
The Clean Water Rule:
Protecting Public Health



Safe and clean water is a vital part of life. It is important for drinking, recreation, hygiene, industry and agriculture. Clean water is especially essential for limiting infectious diseases and preventing their spread — just as dirty water contributes directly to serious public health threats.

The Clean Water Rule's resulting benefits for public health will be substantial. The public health community has long noted the direct connection between clean water and healthy populations, since "the public depends on water not only for basic survival, but for recreation, bathing, cleaning and cooking."

Water pollution affects Americans' health on a regular basis. In the summer of 2014, the country witnessed a dramatic example of the effects of contaminated waterways when a toxic algal event in Lake Erie shut off the main drinking water supply for 400,000 people. In Charleston, West Virginia, hundreds of thousands of people were unable to use their tap water because of toxic substances in the water supply. The Toledo example in particular demonstrates the urgent need to protect smaller streams and wetlands. A number of factors contributed to the algal bloom, including the fact that Ohio has lost more than 90 percent of its historic wetlands, the second highest loss rate in the nation. These waters provide important filters for nitrogen and phosphorus, nutrients that can fuel algae blooms.

The legacy of the Clean Water Act has been to ensure Americans have sustainable access to a healthy water supply. EPA and the Army Corps have now clarified the Clean Water Act and improved its ability to achieve its core mission. Moving forward, the new Clean Water Rule will strengthen protections for that water supply even further, reducing instances of waterborne illness and fulfilling the intent of the Clean Water Act into the future.

"The public health community recognizes that clean water and healthy populations are inextricably linked and that polluted water can expose Americans to harmful contaminants in numerous ways."

— Comment letter in support of the Clean Water Rule signed by: Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments; American College of Preventive Medicine; American Public Health Association; Association of Public Health Laboratories; Children's Environmental Health Network; Physicians for Social Responsibility; Trust for America's Health

Here's what healthcare professionals are saying about the Clean Water Rule:

"Because it would protect the streams that are the headwaters of drinking water supplies for 1 in 3 U.S. residents, this rule is a health imperative."

— Alan S. Peterson, MD, family physician in Lancaster County, PA and member, Physicians for Social Responsibility. http://lancasteronline.com/opinion/columnists/pa-s-drinking-water-needs-clean-water-rule/article_ff758d34-145a-11e5-bcf5-477348854b74.html

"Our nation relies on clean water for basic survival — it's essential for daily activities including drinking, cooking, bathing and recreational use. When that water is polluted, Americans are at risk of exposure to a number of harmful contaminants. We are pleased that EPA has moved forward with this strong, evidence-based rule that will be vital to protecting the public from water pollution and keeping our nation healthy."

Georges Benjamin, MD, Executive Director, American Public Health Association https://www.apha.org/news-and-media/news-releases/apha-news-releases/epa-announces-clean-water-rule

"As the climate changes and we begin to see more extreme weather events, wetlands can serve as an invaluable protection against flooding. Yet without Clean Water Act protections, there is often nothing stopping floods, sediment, sewage or toxic chemicals from threatening our health."

— Janelle Lundgren MD, Physicians for Social Responsibility Ohio member. http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-05/documents/statements_clean_water_rule.pdf

"The Trust for America's Health applauds the EPA and the Obama Administration for advancing this final rule, which applies to the headwaters that supply more than 117 million Americans with their drinking water. It is vital for the nation's health to ensure everyone has access to safe and clean water."

— Jeffrey Levi, Executive Director, Trust for America's Health http://healthyamericans.org/newsroom/releases/?releaseid=325

"As physicians, we care deeply about the health of our patients and of our communities. We know from experience that disease prevention remains the best way to preserve health.

Thousands of people living in the U.S. become ill each year from contaminated drinking water. In urban areas, pollutants include sediment, heavy metals, petroleum-based hydrocarbons, agricultural run-off, nutrients, pesticides, chlorides, bacteria and oxygen-depleting organic matter. Impacts include toxicity to aquatic life, bacterial contamination, and excessive phosphorus and other nutrients in the water body causing unwanted algae growth in rivers and lakes. Because of the Clean Water Rule, more than 50% of our streams in Illinois, including those that feed into Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River, are now better protected from pollution."

— Sarah Lovinger, MD, Executive Director and **Abha Agrawal, MD, Board President, Chicago Chapter, Physicians for Social Responsibility** (unpublished op-ed)

"The final Clean Water Rule announced recently by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers includes important provisions to further protect the general public and our most vulnerable populations, such as children, from increased pollution of our waters. We applaud the collaborative efforts made to create this clear and sensible rule as we continue to strive for the healthiest waters possible for our children of today and tomorrow."

Nsedu Obot Witherspoon, Executive Director, Children's Environmental Health Network http://www.cehn.org/files/CleanWaterRule_final_150601.pdf

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