

# Region's tap water high in salt

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Record staff

People with high blood pressure or congestive heart failure should check with their doctors before drinking local tap water because routine tests have revealed high levels of sodium in Waterloo Region's water.

The region's community

health department will send notices to family physicians about the risk the drinking water may pose for people on salt-restricted diets.

"We'll be notifying doctors and asking them to contact us for advice if they have any questions," said Brian Hatton, director of the region's environmental health division.

Hatton said the water, which in some cases shows sodium at five times the provincial standard, is only a concern for people on low-salt diets. His department decided to send notices out after meeting with regional water officials about high sodium levels reported in many parts of the region.

The provincial Environment

Ministry requires local health officials be advised when tests show sodium levels of more than 20 milligrams per litre in drinking water.

The region's latest report on water quality shows high sodium levels in 45 of 75 samples taken between March and September of last year.

In the Galt area of Cam-

bridge, for instance, sodium was found at levels as high as 107 milligrams per litre, while the Parkway wells and reservoir in the south end of Kitchener reported levels of 116 milligrams per litre and the William Street wells in Waterloo came in at 102 milligrams per litre.

Although water officials say

the problem isn't new, Hatton said he doesn't think the regional health department has contacted doctors about it before.

However, he noted, "we have often advised people not to drink water treated by water softeners because of the concern about high salt content."

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## Water: Road salt seeps into water, official says

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The Waterloo Region chapter of the Heart and Stroke Foundation says people on low-sodium diets should be concerned.

"We don't want to create fear among people," said spokeswoman Doreena Barr, "but if you are on a low-sodium diet and are drinking water with high levels of sodium it would be a good idea to choose another supply of water."

Most people consume a lot more salt than they should even without water, Barr said.

Most Canadians consume between 2,000 and 6,000 milligrams — one to three teaspoons — of sodium a day. That's five to 10 times more than our bodies need.

"Cutting back is always a good thing to do," Barr said, because too much salt can lead to high blood pressure and strokes.

Thomas Schmidt, director of water services for Waterloo Region, said there is nothing new about high levels of sodium in the region's water.

"It has been there for a long time," he said. "We advise the medical officer of health and it is my understanding that local doctors are aware of it. It can be an issue for people on salt-reduced diets."

Sodium is found naturally in the Earth's crust, but concentrations of both sodium — and, to an even greater extent, chlorides — have been on the increase in water, in part because of the

use of road salt, Schmidt said.

"We are working with transportation groups at the region and in the cities to find ways to reduce the use of road salt."

The regional water report also said chlorine levels in many samples of drinking water were too low. There were adverse results for 20 tests in Cambridge, 13 in Elmira and St. Jacobs, 41 in Kitchener and 39 in Waterloo.

The region has traditionally prepared water quality reports once a year, but is now required by the province to file four times a year.

The province forced municipalities to file reports after contaminated water killed seven people and made thousands ill in Walkerton last year.