



# Drinking Water Treatment Methods for Backcountry and Travel Use

This document should only serve as a guide for individuals intending to use untreated or poorly treated water as a drinking water source. This document may also aid travelers and backcountry water users in researching drinking water treatment methods. Except for boiling, few of the water treatment methods are 100% effective in removing all pathogens.

Table Key for Pathogen Removal	
-	not effective
+	low effectiveness
++	moderate effectiveness
+++	high effectiveness
++++	very high effectiveness

Contaminant	Potential Health Effects from Ingestion of Water	Sources of Contaminant in Drinking Water	Methods that may remove some/all of the contaminant				
			Boiling (Rolling boil for 1 minute minimum) *	Filtration **	Disinfection***		Combination Filtration and Disinfection****
			<b>REMEMBER: If boiling water is not a feasible option, the most effective pathogen reduction method in untreated or poorly treated drinking water is a combination treatment, using the appropriate filtration and disinfection methods.</b>				
<b>Protozoa- <i>Cryptosporidium</i></b>	Gastrointestinal illness (e.g., diarrhea, vomiting, cramps)	Human and animal fecal waste	++++	+++ <small>Absolute ≤ 1.0 micron filter (NSF Standard 53 or 58 rated "cyst reduction / removal" filter)</small>	-	+ to ++	++++ <small>Absolute ≤ 1.0 micron filter (NSF Standard 53 or 58 rated "cyst reduction / removal" filter)</small>
<b>Protozoa- <i>Giardia intestinalis</i> (aka <i>Giardia lamblia</i>)</b>	Gastrointestinal illness (e.g., diarrhea, vomiting, cramps)	Human and animal fecal waste	++++	+++ <small>Absolute ≤ 1.0 micron filter (NSF Standard 53 or 58 rated "cyst reduction / removal" filter)</small>	+ to ++	+++	++++ <small>Absolute ≤ 1.0 micron filter (NSF Standard 53 or 58 rated "cyst reduction / removal" filter)</small>
<b>Bacteria- (e.g., <i>Campylobacter</i>, <i>Salmonella</i>, <i>Shigella</i>, <i>E. coli</i>)</b>	Gastrointestinal illness (e.g., diarrhea, vomiting, cramps)	Human and animal fecal waste	++++	++ <small>Absolute ≤ 0.3 micron filter</small>	+++	+++	++++ <small>Absolute ≤ 0.3 micron filter</small>
<b>Viruses- (e.g., enterovirus, hepatitis A, norovirus, rotavirus)</b>	Gastrointestinal illness (e.g., diarrhea, vomiting, cramps)	Human and animal fecal waste	++++	-	+++	+++	+++

**Treatment methods listed above:**

\* **Boiling** can be used as a pathogen reduction method that should kill all pathogens. Water should be brought to a rolling boil for 1 minute (at altitudes greater than 6,562 feet (>2,000 m), boil water for 3 minutes.)

\*\* **Filtration** can be used as a pathogen reduction method against most microorganisms, depending on the pore size of the filter, amount of the contaminant, particle size of the contaminant, and charge of the contaminant particle. Manufacturer's instructions must be followed. More information on selecting an appropriate water filter can be found at [www.cdc.gov/crypto/factsheets/filters.html](http://www.cdc.gov/crypto/factsheets/filters.html). Only filters that contain a chemical disinfectant matrix will be effective against some viruses.

\*\*\* **Disinfection** can be used as a pathogen reduction method against microorganisms. However, contact time, disinfectant concentration, water temperature, water turbidity (cloudiness), water pH, and many other factors can impact the effectiveness of chemical disinfection. The length of time and concentration of disinfectant varies by manufacturer and effectiveness of pathogen reduction depends on the product. Depending on these factors, 100% effectiveness may not be achieved. Manufacturer's instructions must be followed.

\*\*\*\* If boiling water is not possible, a **Combination of Filtration and Chemical Disinfection** is the most effective pathogen reduction method in drinking water for backcountry or travel use. Manufacturer's instructions must be followed.

**Other treatment methods can be effective against some of the above pathogens:**

- **Ultraviolet Light (UV Light)** can be used as a pathogen reduction method against some microorganisms. The technology requires effective prefiltering due to its dependence on low water turbidity (cloudiness), the correct power delivery, and correct contact times to achieve maximum pathogen reduction. UV might be an effective method for pathogen reduction in untreated or poorly treated water; there is a lack of independent testing data available on specific systems. Manufacturer's instructions must be followed.

- **MIOX®** systems use a salt solution to create mixed oxidants, primarily chlorine. As a result, refer to the category above for chlorine disinfection. Manufacturer's instructions must be followed.

**Important:** Water that has been disinfected with iodine is **NOT** recommended for pregnant women, people with thyroid problems, those with known hypersensitivity to iodine, or continuous use for more than a few weeks at a time.

**In addition to using the appropriate drinking water treatment methods listed above, you can also protect yourself and others from waterborne illness by:**

- **Burying human waste 8 inches deep and at least 200 feet away from natural waters.**
- **Practicing good personal hygiene. Wash hands before handling food, eating, and after using the toilet.**

www.cdc.gov/healthywater