



City of Phoenix  
WATER SERVICES DEPARTMENT

# Q&A Chromium 6 (hexavalent chromium)

Page 1 of 2 1/12/11

**BACKGROUND:** Phoenix does not determine standards for tap water, but is required to test and comply with them by the US Environmental Protection Agency. Phoenix has met all requirements and takes regulatory standards very seriously to help protect the health of our customers.

## **1. Is Phoenix tap water safe to drink?**

Phoenix tap water meets or surpasses all federal and state requirements for health and safety. More than five million tests and measurements are performed each year in the water treatment and distribution systems. Phoenix's state of the art equipment and laboratories are used to test for more than 100 substances. Be assured that if water quality is ever an issue in Phoenix, customers will be notified.

## **2. Does Phoenix monitor and test for chromium 6 in its water supply?**

The city of Phoenix monitors for total chromium as required by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under the Safe Drinking Water Act. Total chromium includes chromium 6 and all tests for total chromium have been within standards. Currently, the EPA, which creates standards for tap water providers, does not have a separate standard for chromium 6; therefore, testing strictly for chromium 6 is not performed; however the EPA is expected to provide guidance in 2011.

## **3. Does Phoenix exceed the total chromium standard set forth by the EPA?**

Phoenix's total chromium levels measured entering the city's water lines leading to your tap are well below the EPA standard of 100 parts per billion. One part per billion is equivalent to about one drop of water in an Olympic swimming pool or three seconds in a century.

## **4. What health effects are there from chromium 6?**

The EPA and medical experts currently are evaluating the health effects of chromium 6. EPA guidance to tap water providers is expected in 2011. Currently EPA regulates total chromium based on allergic dermatitis. Research indicates a possible link to stomach cancers. Phoenix is committed to protecting the public health and will respond in a manner that meets or surpasses drinking water standards.

## **5. Where is chromium 6 normally found in water?**

Higher chromium 6 levels are typically found in groundwater (well water). On average, less than five percent of all Phoenix drinking water comes from groundwater. All of the water that reaches your tap is disinfected with chlorine.

**6. The recent report by the Environmental Working Group said that Phoenix had a chromium 6 level of .19 parts per billion. Is that number acceptable?**

Research is being performed to determine exactly at what level chromium 6 may be dangerous, so an acceptable level of chromium 6 has not yet been determined. The EWG report indicated a level of .19 parts per billion (ppb) in Phoenix's water. California has proposed a public health goal of .06 ppb, but the EPA is conducting research that will set a level for tap water providers to achieve. That level is not yet known. It could be lower than .19 ppb or much higher. The EPA typically identifies a level of a contaminant in drinking water that is determined to pose no significant public health risk when consumed over a lifetime.

**7. How does chromium 6 get into our tap water supply?**

Chromium is commonly discharged from steel and pulp mills as well as metal plating and leather tanning facilities. It also can stem from erosion of rock and soil.

**8. How can Phoenix do nothing when the Environmental Working Group already found chromium 6 in Phoenix's water?**

Just because chromium 6 was found it does not mean that it is dangerous to you. We simply don't know the answer yet, as we await guidance from the EPA. Also, we do not know EWG's exact testing methods or locations and cannot determine if their results are valid. Phoenix will meet or surpass any standard for chromium 6 that the EPA may set.

**9. Who makes sure Phoenix water meets standards?**

Tap water is one of the most heavily regulated industries in the nation. Phoenix submits hundreds of reports each year to the Environmental Protection Agency, the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality and the Maricopa County Environmental Services Department.

**10. Should I drink tap water if I have an immune system disorder?**

Although the city treats our tap water to meet or surpass all drinking water standards, some people may be more vulnerable to contaminants in drinking water than the general population. Immuno-compromised persons such as those undergoing chemotherapy, people who have undergone organ transplants, those with HIV/AIDS or other immune system disorders, some elderly people and infants can be particularly at risk from infections. These people should seek advice about drinking water from their health care providers. EPA and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines about appropriate means to lessen the risk of infection by microbial contaminants are available from the EPA Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 800-426-4791.

**11. Do I need to use water filters at home?**

Since Phoenix water meets or surpasses standards, water filters are typically not necessary unless advised by your physician or desired as a personal choice. If you choose to use filters on your tap, refrigerator, etc., be sure to change filters according to manufacturer's instructions.

**12. Where else can I get information about water?**

Detailed information about the quality of Phoenix's water is available online at [phoenix.gov/water](http://phoenix.gov/water) and [phoenix.gov/WATER/qualrept.html](http://phoenix.gov/WATER/qualrept.html), where you'll find a copy of our annual Water Quality Report that is mailed each May with the monthly Municipal Services Bill. You also may call the EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline for information about the Safe Drinking Water Act or the EPA's other drinking water programs at 800-426-4791.