Water Quality Checklist

A guide to your water source, plumbing, filter, and changes at the tap.

Start by finding out where your water comes from. A change in taste, smell, or color is a reason to ask questions. Some contaminants have no taste, smell, or color, so a clear glass cannot tell you whether the water is safe.

WATER SOURCE → TAP / USE → WHAT CHANGED → WHO TO ASK

What to look for

Public water or private well
For public water, check the utility report and current notices. For a private well, write down when it was last tested and what was tested.

Tap and plumbing
Note which taps are affected, whether it happens on hot or cold, and any recent plumbing or water main work.

Filter and maintenance
Record the model, last cartridge change, and what the filter is certified to reduce. Check the certification for the specific concern.

What people noticed
Record color, odor, or particles you already observed. If someone felt unwell, note what they were doing and when symptoms started.

Example: If the cold kitchen tap turns brown after street work, note the time and whether other taps also changed. Call the utility and ask whether there is an advisory and what to do next.

Choose the next check

- ☐ Confirm your water source and look for any current advisory. Follow the advisory instructions for drinking and cooking.
- ☐ Call the utility about a sudden change in public water. Ask whether a tap sample is appropriate if you suspect household plumbing.
- ☐ For a private well, arrange testing at least annually. Ask the local health department about a certified lab and what to test after flooding or a change.
- ☐ Choose or replace a filter based on the specific contaminant you need to reduce. If testing finds a problem, ask what water to use in the meantime.

What to notice and track

Compare what you notice over time and after any changes.

FOLLOW THE PATTERN

Usual conditions → First change → Call or test → Action taken → Follow-up

Keep a copy of the advisory, lab results, or utility response with your notes so you can check what was actually measured.

Observation area	What to record
Source and plumbing	Public system or private well? Note known pipe material, recent work, and filter details.
Tap and time	Which tap? Hot or cold? When did the change begin, and did other taps change too?
What changed	Describe the color, odor, particles, or a taste you already noticed. Record whether it repeated.
What people noticed	If someone felt unwell, write down their own words, timing, and which activity they were doing.
Test or follow-up	Record the sample location, date, what was tested, and the utility or health department's advice.

Questions to discuss

- Is the issue limited to one tap or shared across the home?
- Who can help decide which test or filter certification applies?
- What water should we use while the issue is being checked?

Share recurring symptoms and their timing with a clinician. Bring lab results or advisory details if available.

Further reading

CDC: Preventing drinking water-related illness

CDC: Guidelines for testing well water