

# SAFE DRINKING WATER



● Chronic Disease ● Environmental Health ● Emergency Preparedness ● Family Health  
● Immunizations ● Infectious Disease ● Public Health Laboratory ● Local Public Health ● Minority Health

Safe drinking water is often cited as one of the greatest advancements in public health, but has only been a reality to the vast majority of people in the U.S. within the last 100 years.

Prior to the discovery of the germ theory in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century:

- Drinking water that appeared safe by sight and smell often harbored deadly illnesses such as typhoid fever, dysentery, and cholera that accounted for numerous waterborne disease outbreaks.
- Diarrhea and enteritis — common symptoms of waterborne illnesses — were a leading cause of death from 1900 to 1931.

Under the direction of Glen T. Kellogg, the Health Department developed drinking water standards that regulated biological and mineral contaminants. These were some of the highest standards in the country at the time. By 1974, Congress passed the landmark Safe Drinking Water Act that required water utilities to notify consumers if the water sampling requirements were not met.

Research using water samples from Bauxite, Arkansas, had a positive impact on oral health and paved the way for water fluoridation. In 2011, the Arkansas legislature mandated fluoridation of all water systems serving 5,000 people or more. This will increase the percentage of Arkansans who have access to fluoridated water to almost 87 percent and help reduce tooth decay in Arkansans of all ages.

Today, the Health Department regularly tests each of the estimated 1,307 water systems in the state, providing Arkansans some of the cleanest and safest drinking water in the nation.

**100**  
*Years*  
of Public Health  
in Arkansas



Old State House, original site of the Arkansas Department of Health