Scientists Reaffirm: Water Chlorination Vital for Protecting Public Health

By ACSH Staff — June 18, 1997

Scientists from the American Council on Science and Health today reaffirmed that the continued use of chlorine disinfection of the nation's water supply is necessary to protect the public from potential life-threatening diseases. "Once again, we are seeing a questionable use of rodent data being used to suggest a health threat and the American public is being exposed to needless anxiety about a safe and essential technology", declared ACSH president Dr. Elizabeth M. Whelan.

According to a Finnish study published in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute, a byproduct of chlorination known as MX has been linked to increased rates of thyroid tumors in rats. However, the researchers had used a level of MX far higher than what was present in the typical water system treated with chlorine, and "given what we know about extrapolating high-dose animal exposures to actual risk to humans, there is no reason to be concerned. Naturally occurring carcinogens exist at far higher levels in our food, air, and water without any adverse effect on human health", said Dr. Whelan.

What would be risky would be any move to remove chlorine from the water supply, as it is essential for controlling waterborne diseases such as typhoid, cholera, and dysentery as today's Associated Press report noted, "When chlorination was stopped recently in Peru, for instance, there was a cholera epidemic of 300,000 cases." In short, there is no reason to shut off the tap.

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