

Arsenic levels high in wells across Kossuth County

Where is the arsenic coming from?

Arsenic is a natural occurring element in water supplies, like iron or magnesium. Kossuth County lies in an area called the Des Moines lobe, which is the result of glaciers moving rock that contain arsenic and other metals from Canada and Minnesota. There is no pattern at this time that would indicate portions of Kossuth County would be more or less likely to have arsenic in the water supplies.

What are the potential health risks of arsenic in the drinking water?

Most people consume small amounts of arsenic in the food they eat, but arsenic in your drinking water can create a more serious issue. The most toxic form of arsenic, known as inorganic arsenic, is the form typically found in groundwater. Even low to moderate levels of arsenic can be unsafe. Studies have shown that people drinking well water with elevated levels of arsenic have higher risks of some chronic diseases, specifically various forms of cancer. However, please keep this information in perspective. Other environmental contaminants as well as lifestyles (for instance, smoking) can also cause these health problems and may have greater risks than drinking water with low to moderate levels of arsenic.

The National Academy of Science's best estimate is that, over a lifetime, drinking water with an arsenic level of .003 ppm will cause an additional four to 10 cases of bladder or lung cancer per 10,000 people. As the level of arsenic increases from .003 ppm to .01 ppm, the risk more than doubles and from .01 ppm to .02 ppm it doubles again. Drinking well water with low to moderately elevated levels of arsenic, as is the case in Kossuth County, may over a long period of time lead to *chronic* health effects.

The strongest evidence shows a link between arsenic and skin, bladder, and lung cancer. Some studies suggest arsenic may also increase the risk of prostate, kidney, liver and other cancers, but the data is inconclusive.

Not all experts agree on the health effects, the relative risks, or the levels of arsenic that cause health problems. The risk can vary from person to person due to a number of factors including the amount of water consumed and body weight.

A recent random sample study by the Kossuth County Environmental Health Department revealed that 29 percent of the private wells tested for arsenic exceeded the Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) of .01 parts per million.

The MCL, set by the Federal Environmental Protection Administration, is the maximum allowable for public water supplies. All public water supplies in Kossuth County are tested for arsenic on a two to five year schedule. All the city water supplies in Kossuth County tested below the MCL of .01 ppm. Out of 42 private well samples taken during this study, 12 exceeded the MCL. The test results for those over the MCL ranged from .011 ppm to .0465 ppm.

In this article Jack Bradley, Kossuth County Sanitarian, answers some common questions about arsenic and water. For more information call Jack at 515-295-3813.

Is the water safe for bathing?

Arsenic is not absorbed readily through the skin, so bathing does not increase the threat of illness. Symptoms can include a darkening of the skin, or small corns or warts on your palms, soles, or torso. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have any of these symptoms.

Can the arsenic be removed?

Arsenic is easily removed from your drinking water with the use of reverse osmosis water treatment units or with iron removal treatment (if your water has iron present). Arsenic will attach to iron and be removed by the treatment. Water softening equipment will remove some iron and therefore some arsenic with it, but should not be relied upon unless you have the water tested to determine the amount of arsenic removed by the softener. Finding alternative water supplies that have arsenic removed is also an option. Even though the arsenic MCL is being established at .01ppm, some health experts feel it should be lower. If you find that levels of arsenic in your water is in the range of .003 to .01ppm, you may want to obtain water from another source or install a home treatment system.

Are certain populations at greater risk than others?

It is recommended that small children, pregnant women, or mothers that are nursing seek an alternative source of water. Data suggests that arsenic may affect small children differently than adults. Arsenic can be found in breast milk and can also cross the placenta to a fetus, both of which may affect development of a child.

How can I get my water tested?

If you have your own well, or get water from a shared well that is not part of a public water supply system, have the well water tested. Water sample bottles are available at the Kossuth County Environmental Health Office located in the annex of the courthouse at 109 W. State Street, Algona, Iowa. The cost is \$20 per sample. Please make checks payable to the University of Iowa Hygienic Lab. To set up a time to pick up your testing bottle, contact Jack Bradley at 515 295-3813.

When you pick up your test you will also need to know some information about your well, such as the age, depth, and how many people are using the well.

Where can I get more information?

For more information about arsenic in well water go to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources web page at <http://www.iowadnr.com/water/drinking/files/arsenic.pdf> or contact Jack Bradley at 515 295-3813.

What are the symptoms of arsenic poisoning?

- Thickening and discoloration of the skin
- Stomach pain, nausea, and vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Numbness in hands and feet
- Partial paralysis
- Blindness

Be our Guest

COMFORTS OF HOME

When you're at Kossuth Regional Health Center, we treat you like a guest. In June KRHC began offering a gift bag to all inpatients, with a few items to make their time more comfortable.



TOILETRIES

These necessities are especially nice for patients who didn't anticipate spending the night with us.



MANAGE YOUR MEDS

Medication management is an important part of patient safety. Use this handy tool to keep your weekly meds straight.



LOTION

Enjoy the aroma of this lavender-scented lotion.



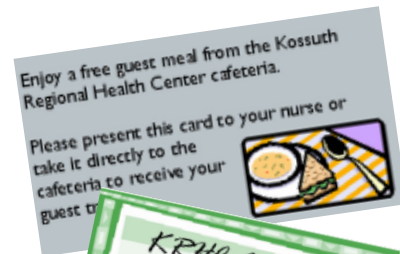
CHAPSTICK

One of the most commonly requested items, according to our nursing staff.



MINTS

Sugar-free mints will keep your mouth fresh.



COUPONS

A cafeteria meal ticket and a gift shop coupon are also in the bag.

TAKE NOTE

Special thanks to the KRHC Auxiliary for sponsoring the paper and pen included in the gift bag.

GETTING THE *MOST* FROM YOUR DOCTOR VISIT

- **Ask questions.** Don't be afraid to voice your questions and concerns. Doctors and other healthcare professionals want you to understand your condition and learn how to manage it.
- **Prepare for your visit.** Make a list of questions to bring with you before you see the doctor.
- **Take someone with you.** A friend or family member can help you write down and remember what the doctor says.
- **Report unusual symptoms.** Be sure to report anything to your doctor that doesn't seem quite right. Tell your doctor about any new or different symptoms.
- **Ask before you leave.** If you don't understand what the doctor has told you, keep asking questions until you do.
- **Bring all your medications** to each doctor visit, including prescription drugs, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, supplements and herbal remedies.

Sleep Lab opens at KRHC

Sleep evaluation and an overnight sleep lab are new services available at Kossuth Regional Health Center, beginning the week of May 5.

Kossuth Regional Health Center is working with sleep staff from Mercy Medical Center – North Iowa to provide these services. Overnight sleep evaluation will be offered two nights a week.

A sleep evaluation provides an opportunity to have your sleep reviewed to identify problems that may be interfering with your rest. With a physician's referral, patients can spend the night in the sleep lab to record their sleep and monitor their breathing, heart activity and body movements. After the study a written report of findings and treatment recommendations will be sent to the patient's physician.

"We are pleased to partner with Mercy Medical Center to provide this service to our patients," said KRHC administrator Scott Curtis.

For more information about sleep evaluation or other Kossuth Regional Health Center services, please call 515-295-2451 or go to www.krhc.com.



Algona man on the road to recovery

If Darald Skilling knows one thing, it's that he is ready to go home.

"Sarge" as he is often called, was admitted to Kossuth Regional Health Center on April 22 with pneumonia. A day later he was a Code Blue.

"He said 'I'm seeing four of everything and then his eyes rolled back into his head," said his wife Joyce. Sarge's heart stopped beating and his breathing stopped.

While Joyce anxiously waited for news in another room, a team of doctors, nurses, and emergency medical personnel worked together to bring Sarge back to life. Had this well-known Algona man been anywhere besides a hospital room with medical professionals close at hand, his story may have ended differently.

"He was definitely in the right place at the right time to have that happen," said KRHC assistant administrator Dar Elbert.

At 69 years of age, Sarge had experienced previous problems with his heart, but nothing quite like this.

"They didn't think he was going to make it," Joyce said.

At one point the Algona EMS offered the use of its Autopulse machine, a fairly new piece of equipment that performs the chest compressions used in CPR. Jim Elbert, a volunteer member of the Algona Ambulance team and the maintenance manager at Kossuth Regional Health Center, was on hand to instruct staff on how to operate the machine.

The group effort paid off, and luck was in Sarge's favor. Once he was stabilized enough to make the trip, Sarge (and the Autopulse) were taken by life flight helicopter to Mercy Medical Center in Mason City.

Weeks passed, and Joyce traveled back and forth to Mason City from Algona to visit her husband, a trip made slightly easier due to one of her daughters living in Clear Lake. One thing Joyce appreciated most was the effort the Kossuth Regional medical staff made to stay in touch with Sarge and his ongoing recovery.

"Dr. Lampe is fabulous. Every single day Sarge was over there, Dr. Lampe called to see how he was doing. You don't find many doctors like that," she said.

After a defibrillator was implanted in his chest, Sarge returned to Kossuth Regional Health Center on May 22 for ongoing treatment. His recovery will be a long process, but as Joyce notes, he's lucky to be alive. Sarge

is still waiting for full recovery, and is still a bit foggy on how the entire incident occurred.

"He remembers nothing [about the event]," Joyce said.

Her cardiologist told her that confusion after an incident like this one is common. Many people don't recognize even immediate family members for six months or more after experiencing something like what Sarge went through. While he knows his family and retains many skills, such as reading, bathing and shaving, some strands of his memory are still out of reach.

"He gets confused about things, like he thought his parents were still alive. He thinks he's working - he's retired. He thinks I'm working. But he knows me, he recognizes all of us," Joyce said.

Twice a day Sarge goes to physical therapy and has built up enough strength to walk down the hall a few steps. He has also worked with the occupational therapy department.

Before returning home, Sarge must regain some strength in his arms and legs.

"His legs right now wouldn't make it up the stairs at our place," Joyce said. "The hardest part is getting him to understand why he



Sarge Skilling and his wife Joyce.

can't go home. It will take time. He just has to be patient. I keep hoping it will happen sooner. Before this happened he would go down to the middle school every Saturday morning and teach girls how to pitch the softball."

Sarge is eager to return home and get back to his usual routine.

"He needs to get stronger so he can take his grandkids fishing," Joyce said.

Sarge has many fans cheering him on in his recovery, many of which are KRHC staff that are thrilled to see him on the mend.

"It took our full team to help him through this," Elbert said. "From our medical staff to our maintenance man, each person involved made a difference in this man's life. We are so pleased that he survived this ordeal and enjoy watching his progress as he recovers.

"A long as my heart stays here," said Sarge, gently patting his chest, "I'll be okay."

His heart is certainly in the right place, and soon he'll be back where he wants to be: at home.

Summer athletic physicals

It's the time of year that high school and middle school athletes start preparing for sports by getting their athletic physicals. In order to ensure that you are charged appropriately for this service, please choose one of the following options for payment before your appointment. If your insurance does not cover an annual physical, you can receive the reduced rate for summer physicals at \$30 (this does not include the potential additional costs of lab, immunization, or x-ray services). The \$30 payment will be expected at the time of service. If your insurance will pay for an annual physical, the athletic physical can be performed in conjunction with this exam. If insurance covers this exam, your insurance will be billed at the customary rate. If these charges are denied, you will be responsible for the entire amount. Please contact your insurance company to determine your coverage.

Please bring all necessary paperwork, including your athletic physical form, to your appointment. To schedule your athletic physical or for more information, call the Algona Clinic at (515) 295-7714 or the Bancroft Clinic at (515) 885-2336.

-Lindsay Harms, KRHC intern

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT DIZZINESS



KRHC occupational therapist Kim Dahlhauser, right, performs tests on Alison Brandenburg for benign paroxysmal positional vertigo.

Feeling dizzy? It may be more than just the summer heat. Persistent dizziness when you change positions may indicate a health problem called benign paroxysmal positional vertigo, usually referred to as BPPV.

"This generally affects people that are 60 or older, but I have young people referred with this problem, also," said KRHC occupational therapist Kim Dahlhauser. "Often the prob-

lem occurs without any apparent cause. However, with younger patients it may be caused by a minor jarring of the head, such as jet skiing or some other athletic activity." If you are experiencing symptoms such as dizziness when changing positions, such as bending over, tipping your head back or transitioning from lying down to sitting up, contact your health care provider. Other possible symptoms of BPPV include a sense of spinning or moving (vertigo), problems with balance, lightheadedness, nausea or vomiting. With a physician's referral, KRHC occupational therapy can do a simple test to see if a patient is suffering from BPPV. The problem occurs

when small crystals inside the ear become dislodged and move into the loop-shaped structures in the ear (semicircular canals).

"The crystals act like pebbles in a stream, disrupting the flow of fluid in one ear canal, causing an imbalance and a sense of dizziness," Dahlhauser said.

The test and treatment utilize simple maneuvers that involve positioning the patient's head. This moves the particles out of the canal to an adjacent area where they are less likely to cause problems. After the procedure patients are asked to avoid lying down flat for two days and to follow a few other positional guidelines for the next week.

"Often only one or two treatment sessions are needed to reposition the crystals. However, sometimes they are stubborn and the person may need some additional maneuvers and special exercises to do at home, which helps reposition the crystals and decrease the dizziness," Dahlhauser said.

For more information about BPPV contact KRHC occupational therapy at 515-295-2451.

SPECIALTY CLINIC RELOCATES

The final phase of the Kossuth Regional Health Center clinic renovation involved the relocation of the specialty clinic to an area connected to the main clinic area.

This spring specialists began seeing patients in the newly revamped section of the specialty clinic, located between the main clinic area and the hospital registration desk. Patients that enter through the main hospital doors will turn right to find the sign and door marking the specialty clinic registration desk, waiting area and exam rooms. Patients seeing a specialist are asked to register in this new area, and not at the main hospital or clinic registration desk.

"We have found this location to be a fantastic benefit to our patients," said KRHC administrator Scott Curtis. "The proximity to the main clinic has increased the communication between the specialists and our medical staff, and moving the exam rooms out of a high traffic hallway improved the privacy and comfort for patients seeing the specialists."

KRHC partners with a wide variety of physicians to provide specialized care in the following areas: cardiology, dermatology, ear, nose and throat, nephrology, neurology, oncology, ophthalmology, orthopedics, podiatry, pulmonology, rheumatology and urology.

To make an appointment for the specialty clinic, please go through your family physician or directly contact the office where the specialist is based. Please be sure to specify when scheduling the appointment that it is for the Algona clinic. For more information, call Leann Engelbarts at 515-295-2451, ext. 232 or 515-295-3192.

AUXILIARY SERVICE AWARD

Congratulations to the winners of the 2008 service awards given by the KRHC Auxiliary. Each year the Auxiliary chooses a senior from each school in the county who is active in volunteer service.

This year's recipients were:

CARRIE COURTNEY,
BISHOP GARRIGAN

AMBER BRACE,
SENTRAL

AMBER NERDIG,
ALGONA

JENNY TOKHEIM,
NORTH KOSSUTH

UPCOMING EVENTS

Monday, July 7 -

Childbirth Education Classes are held Monday nights from 6:30 to 9 p.m. Call Community Health to pre-register at 515-295-4430.

Monday, August 4 -

Breastfeeding Basics

Learn the basics of nursing your newborn at this workshop from 6:30 to 9 p.m. To pre-register call Community Health at 515-295-4430.

Tuesday, September 30 -

Diabetic Fall Festival

The festival will be at NIACC in Mason City from 5 to 9 p.m.

Saturday, November 1 - Join us for the sixth annual Legacy Ball, sponsored by the KRHC Foundation. Cocktails and a gourmet meal are served, silent auction and dancing.

Be sure to check our website for our calendar of events at www.krhc.com.

Physical therapy adds new PT assistant



Wendy Divis (left) and Lori Bode serve as physical therapy assistants at Kossuth Regional Health Center.

Kossuth Regional Health Center welcomes Wendy Divis, the new physical therapy assistant at KRHC. Originally from LuVerne, Wendy attended the University of Northern Iowa where she graduated with a BA degree in athletic training. She then transferred to NIACC and graduated with a degree as a physical therapy assistant.

Wendy likes the medical field and always knew she wanted to do something in health care. Being a PTA gives her a chance to work with people of all

ages. She knew that KRHC would be the right fit for her after she did her PTA clinical here. She also liked the fact that she was near her family and she enjoys the community of Algona and the surrounding areas.

Wendy joins long-time employee Lori Bode, who has worked with patients at KRHC for 27 years. Lori graduated from the medical assistant program at NIACC. She became a licensed PTA after passing her boards in 1993. Lori, too, likes working with an array of patients and the range of duties that she has. She also enjoys interacting with her patients.

Lori noted that the equipment and treatments have changed some since she first started working as a PT assistant, and her number of jobs has increased dramatically since she started working. According to Bode the field of physical therapy still involves "hands on" contact with the patients, even with the new services that have evolved such as stress tests, nerve testing, and electrical stimulation.

This duo and the entire physical therapy team enjoys working with patients and developing and carrying out treatment plans. For more information about the KRHC physical therapy department, please contact 515-295-4672.

-Lindsay Harms, KRHC intern

CONTACT KOSSUTH REGIONAL HEALTH CENTER AT:

Algona Clinic: 1519 S. Phillips, Algona 515.295.7714

Bancroft Clinic: 122 W. Ramsey, Bancroft 515.885.2336

Hospital: 1515 S. Phillips, Algona 515.295.2451 or 800.603.8433

KRHC Family Pharmacy: 1519 S. Phillips, Algona 515.295.4567

The Pulse is published by Kossuth Regional Health Center four times a year. Questions and suggestions may be submitted to:

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