Community Questions – St. John the Baptist Parish

- Does Ameba cause intestinal problems?
  o No. The stomach’s natural acids kill the ameba once it enters the digestive system.

- Is water safe to drink with ameba in it?
  o Yes. The ameba can only access the brain through very small holes at the top of the nasal cavity (the tiny holes that allow us to smell). The ameba cannot harm us when we drink water that contains it.

- Is a chlorine burn bad for your health?
  o No. The chlorine burn for St. John involves changing the type of disinfectant used from monochloramine (chlorine combined with ammonia) to free chlorine (no ammonia) and increases the level in your drinking water but not to an extent that would be a public health concern. The chlorine burn that is in place only requires that chlorine levels be at 1 mg/l throughout the water system. The EPA maximum level for chlorine is 4.0 mg/l. Many water systems routinely operate at levels above 1.0 mg/l. While it may be slightly higher in some areas of the distribution system, the chlorine burn does not require the chlorine level to be anywhere near a level that would cause a public health concern.

- If you have an open cut or boil on skin that is exposed to ameba in water, can you get an infection?
  o No. The ameba cannot travel through the skin or blood stream to the brain.

- Why does the chlorine smell so strong during a chlorine burn?
  o The initial change in chemistry from monochloramine to free chlorine will cause compounds that have taste and odor characteristics to form briefly before final conversion to free chlorine. Once this is complete the chlorine is at higher levels that normal in order to kill the ameba throughout the distribution system. Even this change is detectable by the human body and the smell can be noticeable even though there is a relatively small amount of chlorine in the water.

- Can ameba affect animals?
  o Yes, it can affect animals, but only in the same way it might affect humans. It is important to remember that the ameba exists naturally throughout our environment – for example in a lake where our pets might play. However, it is extremely rare for someone to be impacted by the ameba.

- Does running water for 5 minutes help during chlorine burn or does that make more chlorine come into the system? Like when you flush a hydrant?
  o Running the water for five minutes can help clear out old water that may be in the pipes in your home. Running the water will help ensure that you are getting new water, with a safe level of chlorine in it while the burn is occurring. It does not get rid of the chlorine.

- How does ameba affect residents with cancer or diseases?
  o The ameba impacts all individuals the same way and if we avoid getting water high in the nose, we can prevent exposure to the ameba.
• How does a chlorine burn affect residents with cancer or diseases?
  o The recommended levels of chlorine are protective of everyone's health. We also notify hospitals and dialysis centers in the area about the extra chlorine so they may change filters more often that are used in certain medical procedures.
• Explain how an ameba is not harmful in the stomach.
  o The natural stomach acids in the body kill the ameba. It cannot travel from your stomach to your brain.
• How long does it take to kill an ameba? Years?
  o The ameba can be killed quickly with chlorine, but we require the chlorine burn to allow the chlorine time to reach all parts of the distribution system and flush or clean off the biofilm along the pipes where the ameba and certain kinds of bacteria might live. The ameba is present in nature normally, which it is why it is important that the water system maintain the required level of chlorine in the system at all times. The required chlorine level will prevent ameba from being able to live in the water system.
• Why does water turn brown sometimes during flushing?
  o This is most likely caused by mineral deposits in the water distribution system. Brown water is not unsafe to drink, although it may look unappealing or have a slight smell. You should always contact your water supplier anytime you experience brown water.
• Is water safe to drink and bathe in with high amounts of chlorine in it?
  o The level of chlorine required for the chlorine burn is safe for you to drink and to bath in normally. We certainly would not recommend bathing in pure chlorine, but the levels required by the State for the burn and for the normal residuals is safe for regular use.
• Why didn't we receive bottled water to drink after ameba was detected?
  o Water with the ameba in it is safe to drink since your natural stomach acids kill the ameba and the ameba could not access your brain through your stomach.
• Is ameba in any other systems around state or country? Or just St. John?
  o Yes. The ameba has been detected in other water systems in Louisiana, including DeSoto and St. Bernard Parishes and in Ebarb Water District No. 1 Aimwell Area.
• Does a Boil Water Advisory affect the chlorine burn?
  o Boil water advisories are typically issued only when a pressure loss has occurred in the distribution system due to the potential for contaminants to enter the system or when harmful contaminants have been detected in the system that necessitate the need for boiling water prior to use to protect health. A chlorine burn would help mitigate risk during either of these scenarios due to the increased chlorine levels that are being maintained in the system.