

Arsenic in the Environment Around Yellowknife



Government of
Northwest Territories

What is arsenic?

Arsenic occurs naturally in the earth's soil and water. Arsenic is also used to make products such as glass, paper, textiles, pesticides, and is released into the environment through mining.

Arsenic comes in many forms. Each form has a different risk to human health. Harmful forms of arsenic may be found naturally in some soil, rocks and fresh water. Mining activities may disturb this form of arsenic, causing it to increase in the environment. Plants or animals in these environments may also contain harmful forms of arsenic.

Where does the arsenic in the Yellowknife area come from?

Past gold mining activities released naturally occurring and man-made arsenic into the soil and water near Yellowknife.

Can I drink water from lakes near Yellowknife?

No. It is not safe to drink any untreated water in lakes and ponds as it may contain bacteria, viruses and parasites. Drinking untreated water can make you sick.

Can I drink the tap water?

Yes. Tap water for Yellowknife, N'dilo and Dettah is safe to drink. The drinking water is tested regularly and arsenic levels are below Health Canada's Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water.

Can I eat fish from lakes near Yellowknife?

It is safe to eat fish from Back Bay and Yellowknife Bay. See map on page 4 and review the Frequently Asked Questions document posted at www.hss.gov.nt.ca to see which lakes you should avoid eating fish from due to elevated arsenic levels in water.

Can I eat wild berries, mushrooms and other plants near Yellowknife?

It is safe to eat wild berries, mushrooms and other edible plants that are away from roads, industry activities, and contaminated sites.

To see which sites have higher levels of arsenic that can pose serious human health risk, see map on next page and review the Frequently Asked Questions document posted at www.hss.gov.nt.ca.

Can I swim in lakes near Yellowknife?

Yes, most of the lakes near Yellowknife are safe for swimming, boating and fishing.

To see which lakes have higher levels of arsenic that can pose serious human health risk, see map on next page and review the Frequently Asked Questions document posted at www.hss.gov.nt.ca.

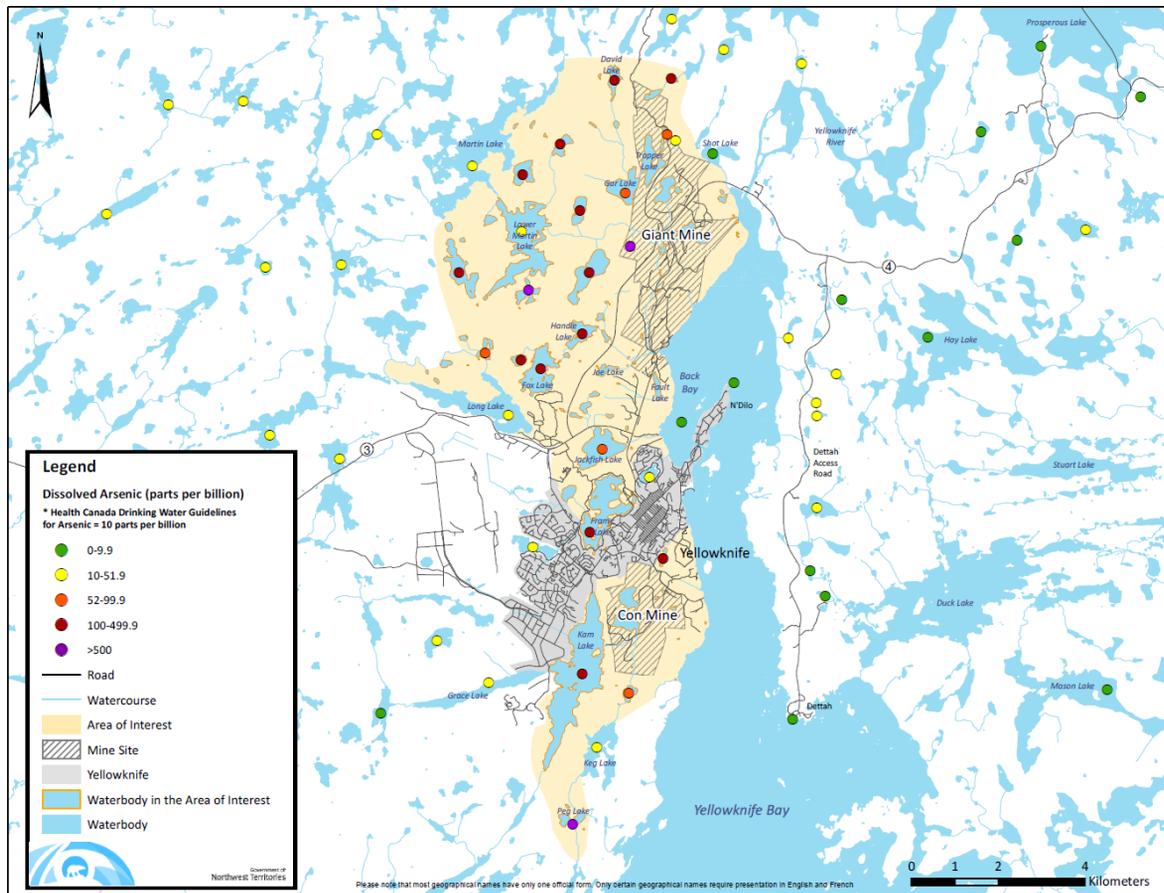
How do I get exposed to arsenic?

Arsenic is a natural part of our environment. Everyone is exposed to small amounts of it from several sources. Sources can include:

- food containing small amounts of arsenic;
- tobacco smoke;
- smoke from wood;
- pesticides;
- drinking untreated water; and
- dust from industrial activities

Map of Arsenic Concentrations Measured in Water Bodies in the Yellowknife Area with Corresponding Public Health Advice

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You can view a larger version of this map at www.hss.gov.nt.ca.

Lakes with green points:

Safe for swimming and fishing.

Lakes with yellow points:

Safe for swimming and fishing.

Lakes with orange, red or purple points:

Avoid swimming, fishing and harvesting berries, mushrooms and other edible plants. Walking through this area does not pose a health hazard.

It is not safe to drink untreated water from any lake.

Avoid swimming, fishing and harvesting berries, mushrooms and other edible plants around:

- David Lake
- Fox Lake
- Frame Lake
- Gar Lake
- Handle Lake
- Jackfish Lake
- Kam Lake
- Niven Lake
- Peg Lake
- Meg Lake
- Rat Lake

* Please note that there are also unnamed lakes within the area of interest found in the map on page 4 where you should avoid swimming, fishing and harvesting edible plants.

Where can I get more Information?

Visit the Government of the Northwest Territories website at www.gov.nt.ca (search arsenic).

You can also contact:

Office of the Chief Public Health Officer at: (867) 767-9063 ext. 49217.

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