

Joshua Basin Water District
Chromium-6 Frequently Asked Questions

Created: February 2026

As you may have heard on the news, read online, or seen in letters from the District, there have been recent drinking water regulatory changes in California. We recognize that you may have questions about what this all means and how it impacts you, as a Joshua Basin Water District customer.

With this in mind, we have assembled a series of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) related to Chromium-6 and your drinking water. This is not a formal notice, but rather an additional resource from the District. We encourage you to review these FAQs and reach out to District staff with any remaining questions or concerns. We are here to serve you!

Why am I receiving Chromium-6 notices from the District with my water bill?

The State of California recently changed its regulations on Chromium-6 in drinking water. The State is requiring that the District send quarterly notices to all customers—using a template created by the State—about these changes. These notices are distributed with water bills and must be approved by the State. The District also posts these notices on the Chromium 6 webpage.

What is Chromium? Where does it come from?

Chromium is an odorless, tasteless metallic element that is found naturally in the environment and is used in a variety of industrial processes. There are two common forms of Chromium:

- Chromium-3 (Cr-3) is essential to the human diet. It is found naturally in vegetables, meats, fruit, grains, and yeasts. It is a common ingredient in most multi-vitamins.
- Chromium-6 (aka: Cr-6, hexavalent chromium, Chromium VI, Chromium Six, Chrome 6+) is also naturally occurring in rocks, plants, and groundwater. It can also result from processes such as steel manufacturing and pulp mills. Many communities in California—including Joshua Basin Water District—have higher than average amounts of Chromium-6 in the local ground water as a result of the **region's unique soil and geology**.

Who regulates Chromium-6 (Cr-6)?

State and federal environmental regulatory agencies set limits on the amount of Chromium in treated drinking water to protect long-term public health. Occasionally, these limits will change, requiring drinking water providers to adjust their treatment to meet new limits.

Both the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) and California State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) regulate Chromium-6, but in different ways. US EPA's maximum contaminant limit (MCL)—or the maximum amount of a contaminant allowed in a water sample—is based on total Chromium (Chromium-6 and Chromium-3). The SWRCB's MCL is based solely on Chromium-6 levels, the more toxic state of Chromium. The US EPA has never adopted a separate regulation for Chromium-6 for cost and feasibility reasons. According to US EPA, the national costs for small systems to meet a revised standard are higher than the overall risk posed to health by keeping the standard the same.

What is a Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL)?

A Maximum Contaminant Level or MCL is the maximum amount of a contaminant allowed in public drinking water systems. MCLs are values established through a very in-depth process that includes significant research periods, extra considerations to be made for small systems, and several public comment periods by the US EPA. The State of California has its own separate, rigorous process for establishing statewide MCLs in accordance with state knowledge and resources.

How have Chromium regulations changed?

The US EPA's Total Chromium MCL has not changed. It remains at 100 parts per billion. The State of California's Total Chromium MCL is 50 parts per billion. The Chromium-6 MCL at the State-level in California recently changed; as of October 1, 2024, the State Resources Water Control Board (SWRCB) authorities have set the MCL for Chromium-6 at 10 parts per billion.

Which of the two MCLs (i.e., EPAs or California's) does the District have to meet?

The District must meet the stricter of the two standards—the one set by the California State Water Resources Control Board at 10ppb. The US EPA allows state environmental agencies to set their own, sometimes stricter health standards for drinking water, in order to protect people against contaminants that may show up more often in water in certain regions, like Cr-6 in the Central Valley.

What is a part per billion? How do you measure that?

It is difficult to conceptualize a part per billion. One part per billion (1 ppb) is sometimes described as being (a) roughly equivalent to one drop of water in an Olympic sized swimming pool, (b) the equivalent of about 3 seconds out of a century, or (c) a pinch of salt in a ton of potato chips.

Overall, a part per billion is an incredibly small concentration of a contaminant in a very large volume of liquid. One way to visualize Chromium-6 in this instance is by suggesting that the US EPA MCL requires that there be less than 100 “drops” of Chromium-6 and Chromium-3 to be dissolved in an Olympic sized swimming pool. Now, California requires there to be less than 10

“drops” of Chromium-6, the more toxic of the two types of Chromium, per Olympic sized swimming pool.

To measure Chromium-6 in drinking water, samples are collected from drinking water. Advanced laboratory methods like Ion Chromatography are then used to measure the concentration of Chromium-6 in the water. The results are usually reported as parts per billion (ppb) or (µg/L).

Why is California’s Chromium-6 MCL so much lower than the US EPA’s Total Chromium MCL?

In many instances, California has *stricter* drinking water standards than the US EPA. The strictness of these standards helps to make California’s public drinking water some of the highest quality in the country. As of January 2026, California is the only state to establish its own MCL for Chromium. The State was compelled to establish a separate Chromium-6 drinking water standard for several reasons. *California’s safe drinking water law requires that standards be set to protect human health above all else, even if setting the standard would be expensive or difficult to implement for water providers.* The US EPA must consider the cost and feasibility of setting a standard for ALL public drinking water systems in the entire country, meaning some standards can’t be as low as scientists would like to recommend. Further, there is a natural, but widespread, occurrence of Chromium-6, the more toxic version of Chromium, in California’s groundwater, specifically in the Central Valley, Mojave Desert, and Inland areas of Southern California. There are some industrial sources of Chromium-6 in California, which require regulation and monitoring. Setting a Cr-6 guideline helps to protect against future, potential health impacts, NOT immediate health risks, which are also regulated.

For more information on the State’s reasoning, visit the State Water Resources Control Board’s Chromium-6 [website](#) or review [this FAQ](#) from the State.

Why did the Chromium-6 regulations change in the first place?

The State of California’s Safe Drinking Water Act requires by law that enforceable drinking water standards, or MCLs, must be set as close to feasible to the Public Health Goal (PHG), a non-enforceable value set at the level of a chemical contaminant in drinking water that poses no significant risk to health, as possible. In 2024, courts in California overturned a past ruling regarding MCLs for Cr-6. This ruling caused the 10 ppb MCL for Chromium-6 to become reinstated in California, starting a chain of events leading toward compliance, which also includes you being notified about Cr-6 in your drinking water.

What is a Public Health Goal?

The Public Health Goal or PHG is different from the MCL in that it is the level of a chemical contaminant in drinking water that poses no significant risk to human health. The PHG does NOT represent a hard line between a “safe” and “un-safe” level of a contaminant; having drinking

water with Chromium-6 values above the PHG should not yield concern about your water quality. The PHG is a health protective level that California's public water systems should strive to achieve. As a result, PHG levels are not legally enforceable because in some cases, it may not be technologically or financially possible to set the MCL at the same level as the PHG.

For example, California has set a final Public Health Goal (PHG) of 0.004 parts per billion (ppb) for arsenic (As) in drinking water but set their final enforceable limit 2,500 times higher at the Federal limit of 10 parts per billion. Both levels are considered safe.

If my drinking water has Chromium-6 above the new MCL, is my water safe to drink?

There is no immediate health threat to you or your family if you continue to drink water with Chromium-6 concentrations above 10 ppb (i.e., the new MCL). The water served by JBWD remains safe to drink, cook with, and use as tap water regularly. JBWD is continuously making plans to improve drinking water quality, including making treatment upgrades to meet the new Chromium-6 MCL.

Chromium-6 exposure is a chronic health concern. This means that its health effects are due to long-term, decades-long exposure. At the new MCL of 10ppb, the health risk of developing a cancer as a result of Chromium-6 exposure is one in two thousand (1 in 2,000) or 0.05% chance of developing cancer during a lifetime of 70 years of drinking two liters of water a day from the same source.

Overall, the choice for the state to regulate Chromium-6 stems from a decision to further reduce long-term risks of drinking water with Chromium-6 values above 10 ppb. The US EPA MCL for Chromium (both Chromium-6 and Chromium-3 combined), which is considered the federal enforceable standard for all other 49 US states, is 10x the proposed California value for one type of Chromium that is considered more toxic.

I also have a groundwater well on my property. Is my water safe to drink?

While JBWD is not responsible for the maintenance or treatment of groundwater wells on private property, there are resources available and steps you can take if you are concerned about the quality of your well water. Many of these resources are outlined in [the guide to private wells published by the California State Water Board](#). The Water Board also hosts a [map of certified commercial laboratories that are able to accept water samples from the public](#)

Has the District tested for Chromium-6? What were the results of these tests?

Yes. Recent tests show an average of 22 parts per billion of Chromium-6 in the District's drinking water. This is above the state limit of 10 parts per billion (10 ppb), but well below US EPA's Total Chromium MCL of 100 parts per billion (100 ppb).

Is the District out of compliance with state regulations?

No. California's MCL changed on October 1, 2024, but the State has given water districts until October 1, 2027 to comply with the new standard. The District remains in compliance, and the water quality has not changed, only the regulations. The water remains safe to drink and does not pose any immediate risk to public health.

How many water districts are affected by these new regulations?

All public drinking water systems in California, including JBWD, will be required to meet the new standard by 2028. As of April 2025, it is estimated that approximately 129 public water systems will be affected by these new regulations.

What has the District done so far to respond to these changes?

The District has taken a number of steps to remain in compliance and chart a path forward. Beginning in 2024, the District partnered with the US Water Alliance to receive technical assistance. Through this technical assistance, the District was connected with Jacobs Engineering to evaluate treatment alternatives to remove Chromium-6 from the drinking water below the State's MCL. Jacobs' work was wholly funded by a grant, and came at no cost to the District's ratepayers.

Based on this evaluation, the District is working on an actionable plan to implement a treatment solution and has submitted a preliminary compliance plan to the State. The District is also working closely with funding advocates and the SWRCB to pursue external funding (e.g., state or federal grants) to reduce the local cost of treatment for Chromium-6.

What happens if the District does not comply with state regulations?

As stated, the District is taking all necessary steps to become compliant with new Cr-6 MCLs by October 2027, or earlier. If the District were to not comply with State regulations for Chromium-6 by that date, only then would the District be considered out of compliance, and subject to enforcement orders from the State and financial penalties.

What is the District's plan going forward?

The District will continue to comply with State drinking water standards and ensure customers have high-quality, reliable drinking water services. To do this, the District will continue working closely with state drinking water regulators and funding agencies to ensure the District remains in compliance and takes every possible step to save the ratepayers money.

The District will continue to update our webpage on Chromium-6 to keep customers up to date on our current actions, next steps, and any changes for customers. For more information, visit

<https://www.jbwd.com/chromium-6>, email us at customerservice@jbwd.com, or give us a call at (760) 366-8438. We're here to help!