

## Arsenic assumes alarming proportion in Bihar

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PATNA: The presence of arsenic in groundwater has assumed alarming proportion in Bihar with 12 out of 38 districts affected by groundwater contamination.

Official sources said that its consumption over the past few years has left many people with serious skin eruptions like white patches and other ailments.

Test of soil sediments in the plains of the Ganga has revealed presence of arsenic in high concentration which seeps into aquifers contaminating the ground water, K K Singh, senior scientist with the Central Ground Water Board, said.

A preliminary survey, conducted recently in the 12 affected districts, revealed concentration of arsenic much above permissible limit of 10 parts per billion (PPB) as recommended by the World Health Organisation.

The survey also revealed that arsenic had been detected at above 10 PPB in 20,000 hand pumps at 316 villages in 39 blocks and above 50 PPB at 235 villages in 36 blocks.

At some places during the survey it was found that arsenic contamination of groundwater was as high as 1,861 PPB.

The arsenic-affected districts are Patna, Bhagalpur, Katihar, Khagaria, Begusarai, Munger, Lakhisarai, Samastipur, Vaishali, Saran, Bhojpur and Buxar.

According to a recent UNICEF study, a population of about five lakh might be exposing themselves to slow arsenic poisoning by consuming contaminated water flowing out of the tubewells in suburban areas of the state capital.

The report said arsenic presence had been detected in the tubewell water of eight villages in Maner, about 25 kms from the state capital. A large number of people have been identified with arsenical lesions.

The study said while the groundwater of Patna was still arsenic free, contamination of water and presence of arsenic had been detected in the groundwater of its suburbs like Danapur and Fathua.

A K Ghosh, head of the department of water and science environment of A N College, Patna, who has analysed over 28,000 samples of drinking water in four districts - Bhojpur, Bhagalpur, Patna and Vaishali, said maximum concentration of arsenic was found at Pandey Tola in Bhojpur district (1,861, PPB).

Bhojpur was followed by Maner in Patna (750 PPB) Bidupur in Vaishali (360 PPB) and Bhagalpur (608 PPB).

According to him, about seven lakh people are affected by arsenic contamination in these four districts.

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