

Arsenic levels shoot up in ground water

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New Delhi: Arsenic contamination in the ground water, the primary source of drinking water in the country, is increasing gradually.

According to the studies conducted by United Nation's International-Children's Educational Fund (UNICEF), Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) and Jadavpur University, the arsenic contamination is spreading to Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Bihar.

Chronic exposure to arsenic, that comes usually from drinking water, can mean skin lesions, pigmentation of the skin and even cancer.

Studies have revealed that what began in eight districts of West Bengal has become a problem in eastern UP districts and places like Ballia.

AIIMS dermatologist Dr Binod K Khaitan said: "We got a case from

Ballia where the patient showed all symptoms of chronic exposure to arsenic, which comes only through drinking water".

He added: "The only problem was that we could not understand how arsenic could be present in such high levels in water in eastern UP."

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- ◆ Arsenic contamination in ground water is increasing gradually.
- ◆ Studies have revealed that what began in eight districts of West Bengal has become a problem in eastern UP districts and places like Ballia. Arsenic in the drinking water can mean:
 - ◆ Pigmentary changes in the skin
 - ◆ Black and white spots on the body
 - ◆ Thickening of soles and palms
 - ◆ Skin lesions
 - ◆ Cancer.

A CSE study revealed that the arsenic levels in the well water and even community hand pump water were much above the accepted WHO standard. In most cases, the level was 5 to 7.5 times the accepted level.

UNICEF's project officer Paul Deverill said: "Our studies have revealed that very high

arsenic levels have been found in some districts of Assam and Madhya Pradesh. West Bengal, however, still remains the most seriously affected. According to our statistics, eight districts in Bengal would mean 4.3 million who are drinking contaminated water."