

# WHAT IS THE “PINK STUFF” IN MY TOILET, SHOWER, OR PET’S WATER BOWL?

“Pink stuff” is most frequently observed in toilet bowls, on surfaces in shower stalls and bathtub enclosures, showerheads, shower curtains, sinks, on tiles, and in pet water dishes. It is caused by *Serratia marcescens*, an airborne bacterium that does not enter the home via Greenville Utilities water system.



## TYPICAL SOURCE

*Serratia* bacteria commonly inhabit soil, dust, mulch, and surface waters. While it may enter the water treatment plant from our source water, the bacteria will not survive in the disinfection steps of the water treatment process. Many times, the “pink stuff” appears during and after new construction or remodeling activities. More people indicate the problem occurs in the summer months when temperatures and humidity are higher, and especially if windows are kept open for any length of time.

To grow and thrive, *Serratia marcescens* needs specific environmental conditions. It requires a moist location where the water stands long enough to lose its residual disinfectant, and where micronutrients, phosphorous-, accumulate. Sources of these micronutrients include food particles and detergent residues in sinks; soap and shampoo residues in bathing areas; urine and feces in toilets; and food residue in pet water bowls. To the home, it warms up and can no longer hold the air. The result is very tiny bubbles.

## HEALTH AFFECTS

*Serratia marcescens* has been found to be harmful to people who are immuno-compromised. Some species have been linked to human urinary tract infections, secondary wound infections, and pneumonia. If you have concerns about *Serratia* bacteria and your specific health condition, please contact your health care provider. Water should become clear. Cloudy water that is caused by air is perfectly safe to drink. Water use can continue as normal.

If the cloudy water was caused by the water being turned off to your residence, turn on the cold water taps in your house and let them run for 5-10 minutes.

## CLEANING RECOMMENDATIONS

Once established, *Serratia* bacteria usually cannot be eliminated entirely. However, periodic and thorough cleaning of the surfaces where the pink slime occurs, followed by disinfection with chlorine bleach appear to be the best way to control it.

To clean pet water bowls, bathroom and kitchen surfaces:

- Scrub the surfaces with a brush and a household cleanser. Use care with abrasives to avoid scratching the fixtures, which will make them even more susceptible to the bacteria.
- Disinfect the surfaces with chlorine bleach
- Leave the disinfectant solution on the affected surface(s) for 10-20 minutes before thoroughly rinsing away with clean water.

## TO CONTROL "PINK STUFF" IN TOILETS:

- Clean the bowl thoroughly and spray chlorine bleach into the bowl and under the bowl rim
- Add  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of bleach to the toilet tank
- Let the bleach stand for 15-20 minutes
- Flush the toilet a couple of times to rinse out the disinfectant. The bleach should not be left in the toilet tank for prolonged periods as it will damage rubber valves and seals.



Running the bathroom exhaust fan, and keeping the bathtubs and sinks wiped down will also help manage this problem.

**Questions? 252-329-2265**

### References

American Water Works Association, Opflow Article: "What's this Pink Stuff in my Bathroom?" November 2000.  
American Water Works Association, Opflow Article: "Avoiding Pink Stain Pain" April 2006