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## Water bugs are back Dangerous parasites detected in our dams

### EXCLUSIVE

By BRUCE McDOUGALL Political Reporter

THE dangerous pathogens giardia or cryptosporidium have been found in Sydney's water supply eight times over the past 12 months — the worst contamination since 2001/2002.

Water Minister Phil Koperberg yesterday confirmed low levels of the parasites had been detected in the dams that supply Sydney's drinking water.

Mr Koperberg claimed Sydney's drinking water was world class but admitted water experts still did not know enough about the health risks of giardia and cryptosporidium.

The test results were released six weeks after the city's main water supply came under threat of serious contamination following drought-breaking rains.

Residents were warned at the time to expect changes in the taste and odour of their drinking water as catchment authorities switched to the emergency Prospect Reservoir.

Yesterday Mr Koperberg said there had been "very infrequent instances" of cryptosporidium and giardia detected in the water storages that supply Sydney.

"In the past 12 months there were eight instances out of 604 in which either cryptosporidium or giardia were detected and all of those were at low levels," he said.

"It is important to remember these results are only from the raw, untreated water in the

dams and not the treated drinking water supplied by Sydney Water to households."

Heavy rains at the start of winter caused a huge dirty plume to flow into Warragamba Dam, which supplies 80 per cent of Sydney's drinking water.

Mr Koperberg said the early warning system for bugs was working and the quality of Sydney's drinking water continued to exceed world standards.

"Sydney Water conducts daily tests at three different locations on the water after it is treated and publishes the results every day online," he said.

In the period 2005/2006 two cases of cryptosporidium and two of giardia were found — half the number of detections recorded in the last 12 months.

The worse year for detections was 2001/2002, when the bugs were found on 21 occasions including two at a high level.

Mr Koperberg said the Sydney Catchment Authority was involved in a number of research projects to "better understand the source, health risks and management of cryptosporidium and giardia".

The organisms — which cause severe gastrointestinal illness — were found as recently as June in untreated water taken from the 100-year-old Upper Canal running from the Illawarra escarpment dams to Prospect.

Authorities said the bugs were successfully treated by the water supply's filtration and chlorination systems.

The test results revived memories of the pre-Sydney Olympics health scare in 1998 when residents were forced to boil water for weeks.