

How Does the Water Cycle Work?

Have you ever looked up at a grey, murky sky and wondered where the clouds and rain come from? It's all part of the water cycle. Read on to find out how the immeasurable amount of water is constantly moving up, down, around and around.

Evaporation

When the heat from the sun warms any patch of water, the liquid turns into a vapour (gas) and this rises because it is lighter. The warmer the air, or if there is a draught or breeze, the quicker evaporation takes place. It even happens on puddles' surfaces. Try and watch the playground dry up next time there has been a shower.

Condensation

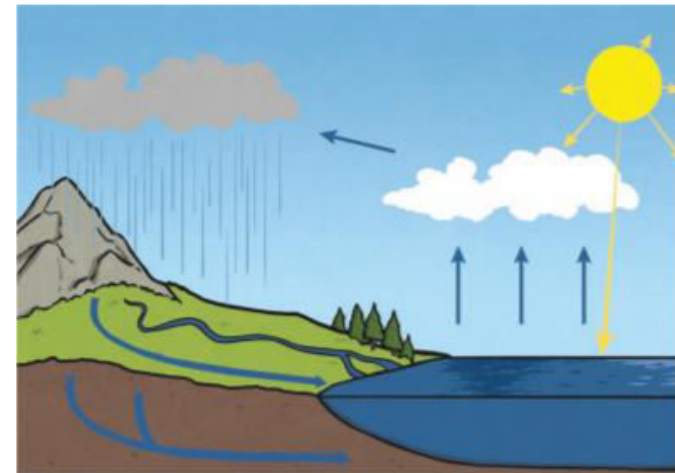
The water vapour is lifted into the sky. As you go higher, the air gets colder and cools down the gas. This causes the particles to condense (come together) and form microscopic droplets of water. Over time, millions of them gather like this and make clouds.

Precipitation

As soon as the water droplets reach a certain size, their weight is too great to stay in the air and they fall towards the ground. This is called precipitation. If the air is very cold, the water falls as ice or sleet. Otherwise, it falls as rain.

Collection

Wherever the water lands, this is the 'collection' stage of the water cycle. Rain and snow may return to Earth in rivers or lakes, on the ground, or on houses and roads, where it soaks down towards the rivers. Eventually, most of this water flows into the sea. The water cycle can now start again, from any place where water has collected even from your soaking wet hair!



The Water Cycle

Fun Facts

- Did you know that about 90% of the world's fresh water is found in the thick layer of ice covering Antarctica?
- More than three quarters of the Earth's surface is covered in water. Have a look at a globe or map of the world and you'll notice just how much of it is blue! Most of this is contained in the seas and oceans but some is also found in rivers, lakes and glaciers.

