

# The Water Cycle

Water is an essential part of life. The earth has a limited amount of water. However, water is continually recycled in a process called the water cycle. It is made up of four main parts: precipitation, infiltration, evaporation and condensation.

To begin with, precipitation occurs when so much water has formed that the air cannot hold it any longer. The clouds become heavier and as a result water falls back to the earth in the form of rain, hail, sleet or snow.

When water falls back to the earth as precipitation, it may fall back in the oceans, lakes or rivers or it may end up on land. When it ends up on land, it soaks into the earth and is stored as ground water. This process is called infiltration.

Evaporation is when the sun heats up water in rivers, lakes or oceans and turns it into vapour or steam. The water vapour or steam leaves the river, lake or ocean and goes into the air. This stage is called evaporation.

The water vapour cools and this leads to clouds forming. However, the clouds are unable to hold the water vapour for long. As a result, rain droplets form and it starts to rain. This process is called condensation.

Eventually, the water cycle begins again.

