

Bacteria in Private Well Water

Bacteria is a common contaminant in Wisconsin wells.

Bacteria testing looks for signs that the water can make people sick.

- ◆ Total coliform bacteria show the well is vulnerable to germs.
- ◆ *E. coli* bacteria show the well is affected by human or animal waste.

Test your well for bacteria regularly.



Test at least once a year.*



Test right away if your water's color, taste, or smell changes.*



When testing, you should use a [Wisconsin certified lab](#).*

Take action if bacteria are present.



Immediately use a different source of water for drinking, rinsing fruits and vegetables, brushing teeth, and bathing babies.

Options for different water include:



Water boiled for one minute



Bottled water



Water from a well without issues



Water from a public system



Throw out ice and drinks made with the water.



Use your dishwasher's heated dry or sanitize cycle or wash by hand.*



Be careful while bathing. Make sure kids do not swallow the water.



Collect a second sample to verify the results.

Talk to your health care provider if you or a family member have symptoms that may be related to your water.

Take additional actions if bacteria are still present.



Continue using the different source of water.



Work with a [licensed well professional](#) to disinfect the well.*



Retest a week after disinfection to make sure the bacteria are gone.



If problems continue, you may need to replace your well or install a certified treatment device.*

* = Additional information is available in the *Resource Guide* (next page).



★ Resource Guide ★



Households with pregnant people and young children may be eligible for **free testing** through their local health department. You can find contact information for your health department at www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/lh-depts/counties/index.htm.



If your well has been impacted by **manure**, follow the steps in this resource: www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p02952.pdf



If your well has been impacted by **flooding**, follow the steps in this resource: www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p02362.pdf



When testing, you should use a **lab** certified by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR). You can find a list of certified labs at dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/labCert/certified-lab-lists.



Follow the instructions in our *Cleaning with Bleach* guide to **sanitize dishes**: www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p00631d.pdf



The DNR has a list of **licensed well professionals** at dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Wells/contacts.html.



The DNR provides **grants** to help address contamination in private wells. Learn about eligibility and covered expenses at dnr.wisconsin.gov/aid/WellCompensation.html.



The Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) can assist you in finding a certified treatment device if drilling a new well is not an option. Contact them at DPSSBProductTech@wisconsin.gov or 608-266-2112.



You should also test for arsenic and nitrate regularly.

You can find information on these and other substances to consider testing for at www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/water/private.htm.



You can find all this information and more at www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/water/bacteria.htm.

**Questions?
Concerns?**

Contact us at
DHSEnvHealth@wi.gov
or 608-266-1120.