

# Test Your Well Water Annually

## ***Why should I test my well water?***

Access to safe, clean water for drinking, cooking, bathing and washing is one of the most important family health issues today. Municipal water utilities test their water regularly to ensure that it is safe, but it is up to private well owners to test their well water annually. Testing is one of the simplest things you can do to protect the health and well-being of your whole family.

## ***What tests should I have done on my well water?***

Three important tests for well owners are bacteria, nitrate and fluoride.

**Coliform Bacteria** are microorganisms that can be found in human and animal waste, in soil, on vegetation and in the surface water runoff. If coliform bacteria are present in your well water, then other bacteria, viruses and parasites that can make you sick may also be present. Hence, the test is used as an indicator of well water safety.

Coliform bacteria can enter groundwater through poorly constructed or unsealed wells, fractured rock outcroppings, sinkholes, coarse soils and quarries. Insects crawling up under well caps and wells drawing in soil particles through air vents also can contaminate wells.

**If there are infants less than six months of age or pregnant women drinking the well water, you should also test for NITRATE.** Nitrate interferes with the blood's ability to carry oxygen, thus causing symptoms of suffocation or "blue baby syndrome" in infants. This is a very serious medical condition. Pregnant women also should avoid drinking water high in nitrate because recent research suggests connections between high nitrate water, birth defects and miscarriages.

Nitrate can enter drinking water from many sources, including fertilizer, animal feedlots, sewage systems, municipal and industrial wastewater, urban drainage and decaying plant debris. Soil types, bedrock structure and the direction of groundwater flow also may influence whether nitrate enters into wells.

**Fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral found in water that has been shown to lower the severity of tooth decay.** Dentists and physicians often prescribe a fluoride supplement when drinking water is low in fluoride.

Our division can also recommend other tests that you might want to have run on your water depending on your well's location, age and nearby land use.

### ***What do I do if the tests show there are problems with my well water?***

If test results show you have coliform bacteria in your well water, a second sample should be taken to confirm the first result. (Make sure you use proper sampling techniques.) If after retesting, results still indicate your well water has coliform bacteria, contact the Environmental Health Division for information on chlorinating your well. If chlorination doesn't solve the problem, contact a well driller or pump installer (check the Yellow Pages) for help.

If a high level of nitrate is present in your well, contact a well driller or plumber for assistance.

### ***When should I test my well water?***

You should test your well water every year for coliform bacteria. If you are pregnant or have infants less than six months of age, you should also check for nitrate.

You can make the testing part of your normal springtime routine, like planting flowers and resetting your clock for daylight savings time. Water should also be tested after flooding or if you notice any change in taste, odor or appearance.

It's important to test well water annually. Even if your test results are O.K. one year, that doesn't mean your well won't have contamination problems in the future.

### ***You can order your Water Test Collection Kit for Bacteria three ways:***

1. Order by phone for \$27 using Visa/MasterCard, \$25, plus \$2 mailing (2009 fees):
2. Mail a check for \$27 (payable to "Waukesha County") and the completed attached form to the Environmental Health Division at the address below; or
3. Pick up a kit for \$25, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Environmental Health Division.

***To test your well water for fluoride or nitrate,*** bring in an eight-ounce water sample in a clean container for each test. Bring the sample in to our office on the same day you collect it, Monday through Thursday before 3:30 p.m. The cost of each test is \$10.

If you have questions on water testing, call our office at (262) 896-8300, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

**It's your family's health...what could be more important!**

**Water Test Collection Kit Order Form**

Send \_\_\_\_ bacteria water collection kits at \$27.00 each

Enclose a check payable to "Waukesha County" or complete the Charge Card information. Mail the form to the Environmental Health Division at the address below.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Visa ( ) MasterCard ( )

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Account #: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Waukesha County Environmental Health Division  
515 W. Moreland Blvd., Rm AC 260  
Waukesha, WI 53188

**Waukesha County  
Department of Parks & Land Use  
Environmental Health Division  
515 W. Moreland Blvd., Rm AC 260  
Waukesha, WI 53188**

**Telephone # 262-896-8300  
Toll Free # 1-800-567-2366  
Fax # 262-896-8298  
[www.waukeshacounty.gov/eh](http://www.waukeshacounty.gov/eh)**

Technical information provided by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the University of Wisconsin, Central Wisconsin Groundwater Center.

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