

Testing Your Well Water

Safe drinking water is important to your health. Operators of public water systems regularly sample water to ensure the water is safe. If you have a private water system, such as a well, it is up to you as the homeowner to make sure your well provides safe drinking water for you and your family. Thinking about having your drinking water tested? There are some important questions you will need to consider. How often should you test your well? What should you test your water for? When is the best time to test? How do you collect a sample and who can test it for you?

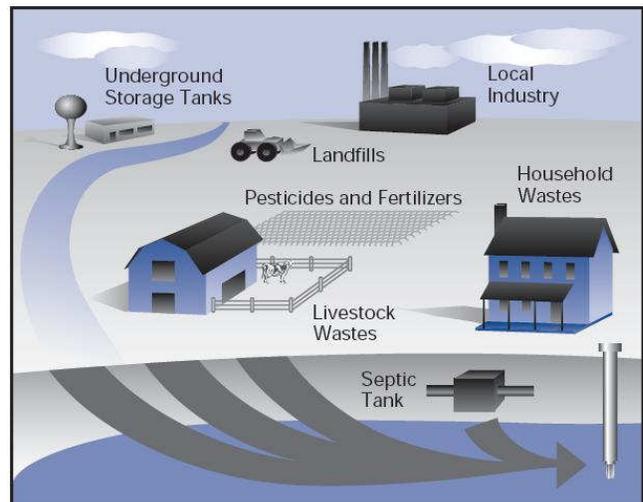


Unfortunately, there is no single test that tells you if water is safe to drink. There are many waterborne contaminants that can cause illnesses if enough are present in the water. These include bacteria, viruses, inorganic chemicals (such as lead and nitrate/nitrite), and organic chemicals (such as insecticides, herbicides, fuel, and solvents). Since there are many potential water contaminants it would be very expensive to test for everything. Unless a specific contamination problem is suspected, as in the case of a nearby chemical spill, most well owners rely on tests for coliform bacteria and nitrate/nitrite as a general indicator of the safety of their drinking water.

Tests for coliform bacteria and nitrate/nitrite are the *most common* tests used around the state for investigating problems with private drinking water wells. If you suspect another source of contamination contact the Health District to determine what water test may be helpful.

Some well contaminants may only be present during certain times of the year. To assess the year-round health of your well, you must collect the sample when contaminants are most likely to be present. Coliform bacteria and nitrate/nitrite are most likely to be found during wet weather when runoff and excess soil moisture carry contaminants into shallow groundwater sources. Late spring and early summer are good times to test for these.

Pesticides and herbicides used on the lawn, garden, or farm fields tend to break down with time reducing the amount of chemical that can migrate into the groundwater. With the exception of large chemical spills, it takes excess soil moisture (for example, extended periods of heavy rain) to carry these chemicals into the ground water. So, once again, spring and early summer are good times to test for pesticides and herbicides.

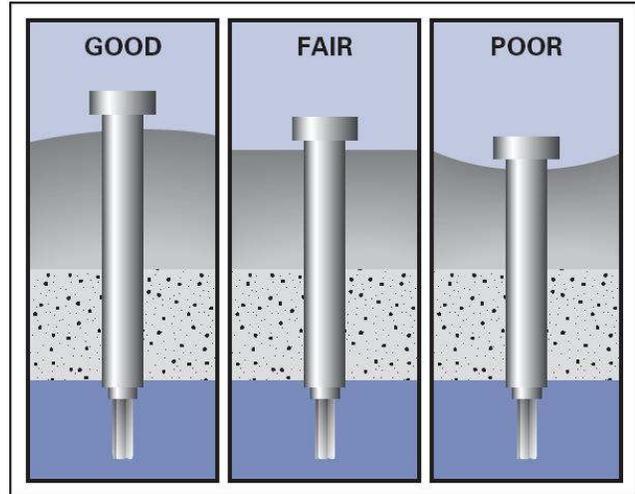


EPA Image

The poorest time of the year to test your well for water quality is during extremely dry weather or when the ground is frozen. In either case, lack of moisture in the soil reduces

the ability for contaminants to move through the soil – and reduces the likelihood of finding contaminants in your well water. So, a “safe” test result during the winter or very dry season provides no guarantee that contaminants will not be present during wet weather.

Laboratory analysis of your well water is one way to help assure a safe water supply. But water testing by itself is only part of the picture on the condition of your water system. A water test provides a snapshot of what the quality was like at the time the sample was collected. As noted earlier, water samples drawn during certain times of the year may test safe even though the same well may test unsafe at other times of the year. To get a more accurate picture of your well’s safety, it is important to combine periodic water testing with a careful inspection of your water system. Loose or missing well caps, holes or cracks in the well casing, or stagnant water ponding near a well are just a few of the problems that can lead to contamination.



You can Miami County Public Health to schedule a water sample or check the phone book for certified labs in the area.

Public Health samples private water systems on Tuesdays and Thursdays each week. To complete a “Water Sample Request” form, visit our website at:

http://www.miamicountyhealth.net/eh/eh_watersafety_main.htm

Feel free to contact us with questions or to schedule a water test for your well:



**Miami County
Public Health**

Prevent. Promote. Protect.

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