

Private Well Water and Your Health

Most private wells provide a clean, safe supply of water for many people in North Carolina. Unfortunately sometimes contaminants can pollute private wells.



As a private well water owner, it is up to you to keep your family safe. Test your water to make sure that it is safe to drink.

Why should I test my well water?

- Contaminants in your well water can make you sick. Both germs and chemicals may cause unpleasant symptoms, such as upset stomach, diarrhea, and skin problems. Some chemicals can increase your chance of cancer.
- In 1999 - 2000, contaminated private well water in the U.S. caused 26 percent of the drinking water outbreaks that made people sick (U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2003).¹
- You might not be able to see, smell or taste potentially harmful contaminants in your water.

What contaminants could be in my well water?

Certain minerals or chemicals may be present in your water, depending on the geology and land use in your area. Many wells in North Carolina have too much lead, arsenic, iron, manganese, low pH and harmful coliform bacteria.

How often should I test my well?

- Test every year for total and fecal coliform bacteria.
- Test every two years for heavy metals, nitrates, nitrites, lead, copper and volatile organic compounds (VOCs).
- Test for pesticides every five years unless you know of specific pesticides that are being applied. In that case, test for that specific pesticide yearly.

If you are pregnant or have an infant at home:

Test your water for nitrates. If you have nitrates in your well water, do not drink the water or use the water to prepare your baby's formula. Use an alternative source of water instead. Boiling your water does not remove nitrates.

(continued)

Who can help me test my well?

Contact the environmental health program at your local health department. They are your best source of information and the most reliable source for testing.

How much can a test cost?

The cost of testing can range from \$25 to several hundred dollars.

Whom can I call for questions?

Call your local health department or the N.C. Division of Public Health, Occupational and Environmental Epidemiology Branch at (919) 707-5900.

Additional Information

Visit our website for more information on specific contaminants and potential health effects:
<http://www.epi.state.nc.us/epi/oii/hsfactsheet.html>
under well water safety.

¹ *Healthy Water Frequently Asked Questions*,
CDC, Summer 2003

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