

Information for Manitoba Private Water Well Owners

Issued by Manitoba Sustainable Development and Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living
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This notice is to assist private well owners in managing their well. Well owners are responsible for managing the safety of their wells and should be aware of the following information and supports.

As a private well owner, you should do regular well maintenance and water quality testing, and install water treatment equipment where required to ensure your water is safe for drinking and other domestic purposes.

All private wells are at risk of bacteriological contamination to some degree. Data from Manitoba and across Canada suggests that on average five per cent to eight per cent (5% - 8%) of wells test positive for *E. coli* and 40 per cent test positive for total coliform bacteria.

What wells are most at risk?

Private well owners are responsible for assessing the risk to their wells. Wells at higher risk are:

- shallow wells (less than 15 metres deep)
- large diameter bored or dug wells
- wells within a community setting that may be influenced by nearby septic systems or other abandoned or poorly maintained wells (studies estimate the probability of wells on half acre lots being impacted by nearby septic systems being as high as 70 per cent)
- wells located near potential sources of fecal contamination (within eight metres of septic tank, 30 metres of a septic field or 100 metres of manure storage)
- improperly constructed wells (ex: pit wells - where access to the well head is at the bottom of a large diameter pit or culvert)
- poorly maintained wells (ex: loose well cap, cracked or corroded casing, poor drainage around the well)
- wells constructed into surface sand and gravel aquifers or aquifers with minimal soil cover
- wells with a history of positive bacteria test results or elevated nitrate (bacteria greater than or equal to 0; nitrate-nitrogen greater than or equal to 10 milligrams per liter)

Test your well

You should test for bacteria (total coliform and *E. coli*) at least once a year – preferably after spring snow melt, heavy rains, or well maintenance. Well water should also be tested for bacteria whenever there is a change in water quality (taste, smell, colour or clarity). Well owners are also encouraged to test for nitrate, trace elements, and general chemistry. The only way to know your water is safe is by having it tested at an accredited laboratory.

Manitoba offers private well owners a subsidy for annual bacteria testing through Horizon Lab. The cost to homeowners is \$21.26. If bacteria are detected in the sample, the resample test is free. Contact Horizon Lab directly for information on sample bottles and sample submission instructions.

Horizon Lab

4055 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3K 2E8
Phone: 204-488-2035 or Fax: 204-488-4772

What if your well is at risk or tests show a concern?

Where risks are high or water quality concerns exist, well owners should:

- take measures to address maintenance issues or eliminate sources of contamination
- boil their water if there is a possibility of bacterial contamination
- install certified treatment equipment, or use an alternate safe source of drinking water (ex: connect to a municipal water supply or purchase bottled water).

For more information on well water quality testing, boil water advisory instructions, and water treatment, contact Manitoba Sustainable Development's Office of Drinking Water at 204-945-5762, or visit www.manitoba.ca/drinkingwater and click on "Public Information".

For health-related questions, call Health Links Info Santé at 204-788-8200 (toll free at 1-888-315-9257).

