



WHAT'S IN YOUR WELL WATER?

Become well water aware

Coliform Bacteria Fact Sheet

What is Coliform Bacteria?

- Total coliform bacteria are a large group of different kinds of bacteria.
- Coliform bacteria are present in the environment and feces of all warm-blooded animals.
- Total coliform bacteria are common in the environment and are generally harmless.
- If your well water test results come back positive for total coliform bacteria, that doesn't necessarily mean that you are at immediate risk of becoming sick. However, it does mean that more testing should be conducted.
- Fecal coliform bacteria are a subgroup of total coliform bacteria. E. coli is a subgroup of fecal coliform bacteria that originates in the intestines of animals, including humans, and has a short life span compared to non-fecal coliform bacteria.

Why is it a health concern?

- The presence of some types of coliform bacteria could indicate that feces or sewage waste has infiltrated your well water.
- Confirmation of E. coli in well water could pose an immediate health risk to anyone who uses the water for drinking or hygiene purposes.

What are the health effects?

- Symptoms of illness from coliform bacteria may include gastrointestinal illnesses such as severe diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, headaches, fatigue, and fever.
- Children, the elderly and those with compromised immune systems are at a higher risk of becoming sick from contaminated drinking water.
- Coliform bacteria are not the only pathogen in your well water that can cause disease. The presence of coliform bacteria may indicate that there is contamination of other bacteria, viruses, or protozoa. Giardia and Cryptosporidium are examples of protozoa that could cause illness and be present in the water.
- Contact your physician if you suspect that you may be sick from bacteria or other pathogens in your water. Discuss your well water test results with your physician.

How do I test for coliform bacteria in my private water well?

- To make sure that your well water is safe to drink, test the water at least once a year.
- If one or more people in your household have symptoms of gastrointestinal illness, or if other situations come up like flooding in the area, there is a disturbance of the well cap, well equipment fails or hasn't been maintained properly, test your well water.
- You should test for fecal coliform or E. coli bacteria if well water testing indicates the presence of total coliform bacteria.

What should I do if my well water test results show the presence of coliform bacteria, fecal coliform, or E. coli?

- If laboratory tests confirm the presence of either total coliform or fecal coliform bacteria in your private water well, you should use an alternative source of water. Short-term disinfection of water for drinking and food preparation can be done by vigorously boiling water for 1 minute.
- Disinfect your well and seek assistance to determine the source of water well contamination. When coliform bacteria are found in well water, a full inspection of the water system should be conducted to determine how the contamination got into the water.
- You can contact your county environmental health sanitarian or licensed well water contractor for recommended procedures to disinfect the well.
- Test the well after disinfection to make sure it is safe to drink.

Who do I contact for more information?

- Contact your state or local environmental sanitation department for more information about private well water safety.
- Contact your local health department or the KDHE Epidemiology Hotline at 1-877-427-7317 for more information about health concerns.

Disclaimer: This fact sheet answers the most frequently asked questions about coliform bacteria. Information is provided for this contaminant because it is one of the most common contaminants private well water owners test for because of the potential to cause illness. It is not intended to be a comprehensive guide for private water well testing.



For Additional Information or Local Assistance

visit www.kdheks.gov/WellWaterAware or call 785-296-5500.

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