

Testing Your Well Water

The Importance of Well Water Testing

Unchecked environmental factors can contaminate your well water.

Contaminants can be naturally-occurring in the land around the well (ex. arsenic or radon), microbial or viral contamination from an onsite septic system or a nearby feedlot, or from local land use practices involving fertilizers and pesticides.

Shallow wells, poorly sealed or constructed wells, and wells that draw from shallow aquifers are at greatest risk of contamination.

People at increased risk for getting waterborne illnesses:

- People 50 years or older
- Current or former smokers
- People with a chronic lung disease (like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD] or emphysema)
- Immunocompromised
- People with underlying illnesses such as diabetes, kidney failure, or liver failure
- Infants under 6 months old
- Contact lens wearers

How Often Should I Test My Water?

Test once a year in the spring for:

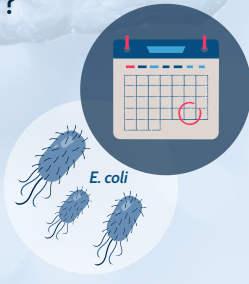
- bacteria (total coliform and *E. coli*),
- nitrates, and
- nitrites.

Another test should be done if:

- the well has been flooded or recently repaired,
- there is a change in the taste, odor, or appearance of the well water, or
- family members or house guests have recurrent incidents of gastrointestinal illness.

Every 3-5 years, a standard well water test should be done to test for:

- chloride,
- iron,
- calcium
- pH,
- manganese,
- magnesium, and
- hardness,
- uranium
- radon.
- copper,
- arsenic



Where Can I Get My Well Water Tested?

Well water tests can be purchased through Maine's Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory (HETL), or another state register laboratory. Contact the health department for assistance in purchasing a test kit.

HETL Well Water Test Recommendation:

- Basic Safety Test once a year
- Well Evaluation once every 3-5 years
- Radon Water Test once every 3-5 years



How Do I Use My Well Water Test Kit?

Once you receive your test kit, follow the instructions that came with the sampling kit carefully.

Some General Guidance For Most Well Water Test Kits:

- It is recommended to test the water from your kitchen sink because most people use it to drink and to cook with.
- If there is a filter on your kitchen sink faucet, remove it and let the water run for five minutes.
- Fill out the paperwork that came with your test. This can be done while the water is running.
- Carefully unscrew the sample bottle and fill to the top with water. Then, replace the cap without touching the inside of the cap or the rim.
- Mail the water sample with the completed papers to the lab you ordered the test from right away.

Testing Your Well When Expecting a Newborn

High nitrate levels in well water can decrease the blood's ability to transport oxygen, especially in newborns. This condition is called methemoglobinemia or "blue baby syndrome".

Test for nitrate in the early months of a pregnancy, before bringing an infant home, and again during the first six months of the baby's life. Infants fed with formula made with well water are the most at risk.



What Should I Do If My Test Results Are Over Safe Levels?

Switch to bottled water until you are able to fix the problem at hand. Test your well again before switching back to well water to ensure the contamination problem has been resolved.



For a video on how to test your well, check out "How to Test Your Well".