



HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE RESULTS OF YOUR WELL WATER TESTS



WHY SHOULD I TEST MY WATER?

- Drinking water contaminated with disease-causing bacteria can make you or your family seriously ill. Symptoms can range from stomach cramps, nausea, watery and bloody diarrhea to vomiting, and fever. By testing your well water three times a year, you could help avoid such problems.

WHAT DO THE TEST RESULTS MEAN?

Your test results may include the following terms:

Coliform Bacteria:

- Several types of ground surface bacteria, found in the soil and decaying vegetation. Coliforms may also be associated with human or animal faecal contamination. The repetitive detection of coliform bacteria (>5) indicates contamination and an unsafe condition.

Escherichia coli (E. coli) Bacteria:

- A type of disease-causing bacteria that can be present in the digestive system of humans and animals. Contaminated waste or sewage can leak into the surrounding ground water and contaminate the well water supply.
- Some types of E. coli bacteria can cause serious illness and can be fatal in some infants, children, and the elderly. Any detection of E. coli (>0) indicates contamination and an unsafe condition.

The water sample is esthetically unclean for drinking:

- It can happen that public health laboratories decide not to analyze a sample if they deem it esthetically unclean for drinking. Yellowish or greyish water are usually part of that category. These waters can contain other substances such as iron or other minerals which make water unclean for drinking. In such a case, you first have to install a water filtration system before proceeding to a bacteriological analysis of the water. Private laboratories may assist you in identifying some of these other substances.



**For more information, please contact the Eastern Ontario Health Unit
at 933-1375 or at 1 800 267-7120 and ask for Health Line. Visit our website at www.eohu-bseo.on.ca.**

h13-041e

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WHAT'S SAFE AND WHAT'S NOT SAFE?

Safe results:

-  **Total Coliform Bacteria: 0**
-  **E. coli bacteria: 0**

Three negative samples, those with no coliform or E. coli bacteria, collected one week apart indicate a bacteriologically safe water supply.


Unsafe Results:

-  **Total Coliform bacteria: 1 to 5 on repeated sampling, or 6 or more on a single test**

... could indicate a deterioration of the water supply or that surrounding bacteria are entering the well water supply. A re-sampling must be done. **Do not drink the water. Disinfect the well as per instructions.**

-  **E. coli Bacteria: 1 or more**

... could indicate a source of human or animal waste or sewage near the well. **Do not drink the water. Disinfect the well immediately as per instructions.**

-  **Estimate (Est.) or Overgrowth (O/G)**

... could indicate that too many bacteria were present to do an accurate test. **Do not drink the water. Disinfect the well as per instructions..**

WHAT DO I DO IF THE TESTS SHOW THE WATER'S UNSAFE?

- ▶ **If the first test results indicate the presence of coliforms or E. coli bacteria, do not wait to get the other samples before you start using precautions. Boil your water for at least one minute or drink bottled water until you have received all your test results.**
- ▶ **Depending on the type of contamination, you may want to take a second water sample or disinfect the well immediately.**
- ▶ **Before taking the second water sample, remove the aerators from the faucet and let the water flow for two to three minutes.**
- ▶ **If this second test result shows contamination, you must disinfect the well. Please refer to our *Health • Full* on How to Disinfect Your Well (# h13-253).**

