

Flooding and Well Water Safety

During a flood there is an increased risk that drinking water wells may become contaminated with bacteria and/or any other contaminants that may be present in the flood water. Any well water system, whether deep or shallow, can become contaminated when flooding occurs.

Once the flood waters recede, everyone with a private water supply that has been affected by flooding should get a bacteria test done before resuming usual water consumption. The flood affected private well-water testing full subsidy is now complete for 2011.

Risk factors for well water

There is increased risk of contamination of well water when:

- wells or aquifers are shallow and/or the overlying soils are permeable (ex: sand or gravel)
- wells are located in pits or depressions where water can pool
- wells have rusted, cracked or unsealed casings that do not extend at least 30 centimeters above ground
- wells are near septic tanks or fields, barns, feed lots or other potential sources of contamination
- wells are near unsealed abandoned wells, sink holes, quarries or other potential groundwater contamination pathways
- wells close to yours are flooded and may be contaminated

When boiling is necessary

If any of the above risk factors pertain to your well and your property is experiencing flooding, or if you notice a change in the colour, clarity, taste or odour of your well water; then tap water used for drinking or for preparing food should be brought to a rolling boil for one minute.

Once boiled, the water is safe to be used for:

- drinking
- making infant formula and juices
- cooking
- making ice
- washing fruits and vegetables
- brushing teeth

An alternative to boiling water is to use water from a known safe source such as bottled water.

Using water for other domestic purposes

Tap water from flood-affected wells can be used for:

- laundry
- bathing
- washing dishes

Adults, teenagers and older children can use the water to shower but should avoid swallowing the water. Toddlers and infants should be sponge bathed instead of bathing in a tub.

Testing well water

Once flood conditions have subsided your well water should be tested by an accredited laboratory for bacterial contamination. You should continue to boil your water or use bottled water until testing confirms the water is safe for drinking or food preparation.

Steps for testing well water

- Home owners are responsible for collecting their own well water samples.
- Sample bottles, a sample submission form, and instructions for sampling are available from most rural municipal offices, Manitoba Water Stewardship and Conservation offices, or directly from Maxxam Analytics. The 2011 flood subsidized well water testing ended as of October 31, 2011.

Maxxam Analytics

Unit D, 675 Berry Street

Winnipeg MB R3H 1A7

Phone: 204-772-7276

Toll Free: 1-866-800-6208

Monday to Friday: 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.

As of September 30, 2011 hours of operation are:

Monday to Friday: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

- It is very important to follow the sampling instructions provided by the laboratory and ensure that the sample submission form includes accurate contact information and well location information (ex: legal land description).

Submitting well water samples

Sample bottles need to be dropped off at Maxxam Analytics within 24 hours of collecting the water sample.

Receiving water samples results

Once testing is completed, the results for your well water sample will be forwarded to you by the laboratory along with follow-up instructions if the well showed signs of contamination. If you do not receive the results within two weeks of submission you should follow up with the laboratory.

Well restoration after flooding subsides

NOTE: This section applies to wells that have been overtopped, completely submerged or have suffered structural damage and have major contamination (as opposed to wells that may have had a little seepage).

- Extensive well restoration may be needed if your well has been structurally damaged, completely submerged, overtopped, or if you've seen flood water draining into your well. Floodwater and sediment can damage pumps and their electrical components. All assessments, repairs and replacements should be done by qualified professionals. It may not be safe to turn on your pump until your well is cleaned out, and all sediment and floodwater are removed.

Well owners who have experienced this type of problem should contact Groundwater Management at 204-945-3737 or other appropriately qualified professionals (ex: well drillers or plumbers) in their local area.

For more information

For more information on wells, well water testing, disinfection and interpretation of water testing results, contact:

- Manitoba Office of Drinking Water
www.gov.mb.ca/drinkingwater or 204-945-5762 in Winnipeg
- your local drinking water officer
www.gov.mb.ca/waterstewardship/odw/odw-contacts/index.html
- Health Links-Info Santé at 204-788-8200 in Winnipeg; toll free 1-888-315-9257

Or go to:

- Drinking Water Fact Sheets
www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/environmentalhealth/water.html