

Understanding Your Well Water Bacteria Results

Private well owners are responsible for testing and, if necessary, treating their water to ensure it is safe to drink. It is recommended that you test your well water at least once a year for total coliform and *E. coli* bacteria. Early spring, once snow melt and surface runoff have finished, or following a heavy rainfall, is a good time to sample your well. Melting snow and running water can carry surface contaminants into your well water.

Test regularly even if your water seems fine. You can't taste, smell or see bacteria. Do not rely on your neighbour's test results: wells that are only a short distance apart can have different water quality.

What do the results mean?

The Manitoba drinking water quality standard for bacteria (total coliforms and *E. coli*) in drinking water is 0 per 100 ml. This is the same as the maximum acceptable concentration listed in the Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality.

If you receive an adverse test result (total coliforms or *E. coli* >0), or have any reason to believe your drinking water is contaminated by bacteria, do not consume the water until the water quality issue is solved and new test results show the water is safe. The tables below provide more information to help in understanding the test results:

Total Coliforms

0	Safe for drinking and cooking
1-10	Low health risk, potential sampling error, follow boil water advisory instructions as precaution, look for potential contamination sources (loose well cap, water from eaves trough down spouts draining towards well casing, void in ground around casing, etc.), resample
>10	Unsafe for drinking, follow boil water advisory instructions, look for potential contamination sources, disinfect well (shock), resample

E. coli

0	Safe for drinking and cooking
1 and above	Unsafe for drinking, follow boil water advisory instructions, look for potential contamination sources (leaky septic system, animal droppings around well, manure storage close to well, etc.), disinfect well (shock), resample
>200	Unsafe for all domestic uses (washing dishes, showering, bathing). Do not use the water for any purpose other than flushing toilets.

For more information

Boil water advisory instructions are available online at www.manitoba.ca/drinkingwater under "Public Information" and the "Boil Water Advisory Fact Sheets" link.

The Province of Manitoba has also developed a series of well water fact sheets that are available online at www.manitoba.ca/drinkingwater under "Public Information" and the "Private Well Fact Sheets" link. The fact sheets cover topics on how to test well water, reduce the risk of well contamination, and instructions on how to disinfect (shock) a well, among others.