

Private Drinking Water Wells

If your family gets drinking water from a private well, do you know if your water is safe to drink? What health risks could you and your family face? Where can you go for help or advice?

According to the EPA approximately 15 percent of Americans rely on their own private drinking water supplies, and these supplies are not subject to Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards, although some state and local governments do set rules to protect users of these wells. Unlike public drinking water systems serving many people, they do not have experts regularly checking the water's source and its quality before it is sent to the tap. These households must take special precautions to ensure the protection and maintenance of their drinking water supplies.

Proper well construction and continued maintenance are keys to the safety of your water supply. Your state water-well contractor licensing agency, local health department, or local water system professional can provide information on well construction.

The well should be located so rainwater flows away from it. Rainwater can pick up harmful bacteria and chemicals on the land's surface. If this water pools near your well, it can seep into it, potentially causing health problems.

Many homeowners tend to forget the value of good private well maintenance until problems reach crisis levels. That can be expensive. It's better to maintain your well, find problems early, and correct them to protect your well's performance. Keep up-to-date records of well installation and repairs plus any water test results. Such records can help spot changes and possible problems with your water system. If you have problems, ask a licensed well driller or service company to check your well construction and maintenance records. He or she can see if your system is working correctly or needs any work.

Have your water tested every 3 to 5 years, it is recommended that water be tested every year for total coliform bacteria, nitrates, total dissolved solids, and pH levels. Always use a lab that is certified for testing to help you identify potential problems, <http://www.nj.gov/dep/oqa/certlabs.htm>

Testing more than once a year may be warranted in special situations:

- someone in your household is pregnant or nursing
- there are unexplained illnesses in the family
- your neighbors find a dangerous contaminant in their water
- you note a change in water taste, odor, color or clarity
- there is a spill of chemicals or fuels into or near your well
- when you replace or repair any part of your well system

Identify potential problems as the first step to safeguarding your drinking water. The best way to start is to consult a local expert, someone that knows your area, such as the local health department, an agricultural extension agent of Rutgers University or a nearby public water system (New Jersey American Water).

Please feel free to contact the Branchburg Health Department for more information at 908-526-1300 ext.183. Below is an EPA website noting many details that will help you make informed decisions about how to proceed with your potable drinking water well

<http://water.epa.gov/drink/info/well/>

Carl Scialfa, REHS, Health Inspector.