

# Testing Your Well Water

## FREE TESTING

This free testing service is available at the OAHPP Lab at 336 Syndicate Avenue S. Lab hours are Monday to Friday, 8:00 to 4:30. Contact the lab at 622 6449. Sample bottles are available there and at our office at 562 Red River Road.

## WHEN TO TEST

Test your well in early spring and the day after a heavy rainfall. Melting snow and running water can carry surface contaminants into your well water. If your well water is safe under these conditions, it is most likely to be safe the rest of the year.

Test regularly, even if your water seems fine, because you cannot always taste, smell or see bacteria or other contaminants.

## Test for *bacterial contamination*

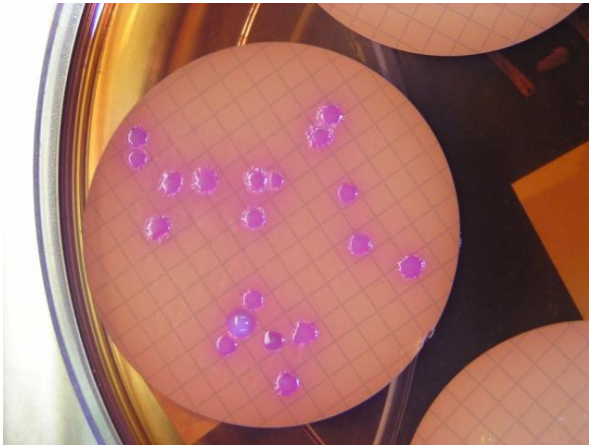


Testing at least three times a year for bacteria is recommended by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment and the Ontario Ministry of Health.

## SAMPLING PROCEDURE

- Use the water sample bottle provided by the lab to collect your sample. Do not rinse the bottle first.
- Select a tap where you can remove aerator or any other attachments.
- Wash your hands thoroughly.
- Disinfect the end of the tap by holding a small amount of bleach in the bleach bottle cap to the tap.
- Run cold tap water for two to three minutes. (Listen for the pump to complete a cycle if possible.)
- Check the sample bottle's lid. If the tamper proof ring has separated from the cap use another bottle.
- Remove the sample bottle lid. **Do not** touch the bottle lip, inside the lid, or inside the bottle. **Do not** set the lid down on the counter. Hold it in your other hand while you collect a sample.
- Fill the sample bottle **to the indicator line** directly from the tap without changing the flow of water.
- Replace the cap tightly.
- Complete the form that came with the bottle.
- Refrigerate the sample after collection (*do not freeze*) and transport in a cooler with an ice pack.
- Take the sample and form to the laboratory within 24 hours of collection.

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## TEST RESULTS

You can have the test results mailed to you, or you can pick them up at the lab (with proper ID). You can also access the test results via a toll-free telephone number a few days after dropping off your sample.

The test result will consist of two numbers – the first for the total coliform count, and the second for *E. coli*. Coliforms are bacteria commonly found in soil and vegetation. Their presence in your well water indicates that surface water is gaining access to your well. *E. coli* is a bacteria from the intestinal tract of warm blooded animals (humans, other mammals, birds).

*E. coli* in your water can be from a malfunctioning septic system or manure pile too near the well. Dog droppings on the lawn or even mouse, squirrel, or bird droppings nearby can result in *E. coli* in your water, especially if the well's lid is not properly sealed or if there are any other structural defects in the well.

## TOTAL COLIFORM, *E. COLI*

If the total coliform count is five or less and the *E. coli* count is zero, the water is considered safe to drink. Any detectable presence of *E. coli* means the water is NOT safe to drink.

A total coliform count between 6 and 80 indicates a problem and may be unsafe to drink. A total coliform count greater than 80 means the sample has more bacteria than could be counted (see picture with 19 count).

A single test for total coliform and *E. coli* is not always enough to determine the quality of your well water. If your well has not been tested regularly, submit three samples at least a week apart.

## SHOCKING YOUR WELL

You may receive instructions to shock the well with bleach (chlorine) if a water sample shows levels of bacteria. Shocking the well with chlorine is a temporary method of disinfection used to eliminate a one-time case of bacterial contamination.

Shocking should not be used routinely or repeatedly. It is not a substitute for eliminating an ongoing source of contamination or a defect in your well.

Always work with a licensed well contractor to resolve any structural defects in your well. Check our website, [www.ecosuperior.org](http://www.ecosuperior.org). Look for 'Well Aware' under the water protection section for more information about caring for your well. There you will find a list of local well contractors, licensed by the Ministry of the Environment.