



When should I test my well water?

You should test your well water every year for coliform bacteria. If you are pregnant or have infants under six months of age, you should also check for nitrate. Water should also be tested if you notice any change in taste, odor or appearance or after flooding.

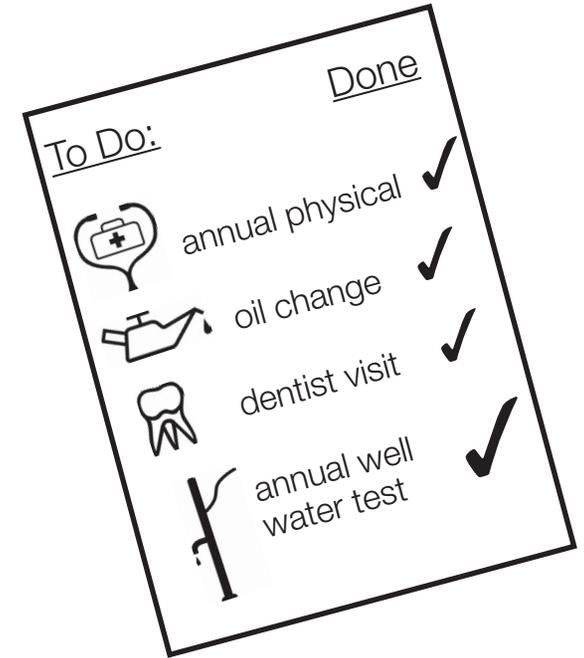
You can make the testing part of your normal springtime routine, like planting flowers and resetting your clock for daylight savings time.

Fall is also a good time to test. Just be sure to make it an annual habit.

It's important to test well water annually because even if your test results are O.K. one year, that doesn't mean your well won't have contamination problems in the future.

For more information on getting your well water tested, contact the organization listed below or check your Yellow Pages for laboratories that perform well water tests. They'll be listed under "Laboratories—Testing" or "Environmental Services." You also can contact your local public health agency for a list of laboratories certified to perform coliform testing or visit the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Website at www.dnr.state.wi.us.

Brochure written by the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene (465 Henry Mall, Madison, WI 53706-1578) with technical information provided by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the University of Wisconsin Central Wisconsin Groundwater Center.



Take care
of what's
important
to YOU

Test your well water annually



Why should I test my well water?

Safe, clean water is one of the most important substances in our lives—for drinking, cooking, bathing and cleaning. Municipal water systems test their water regularly to ensure it's safe, but it's up to private well owners to test their well water annually. It's one of the simplest things you can do to take care of the health and well-being of yourself and those you love.



What tests should I have done on my well water?

Two very important tests well owners should have are for coliform bacteria and nitrate.

COLIFORM BACTERIA are microorganisms that can be found in human and animal waste, in soil, on vegetation and in surface water runoff. If coliform bacteria are present in your well water, then other bacteria, viruses and parasites that can make

you sick may also be present. Hence, the test is used as an indicator of how sanitary the well water is.

Coliform bacteria can enter groundwater through poorly constructed or unsealed wells, fractured rock outcroppings, sinkholes, coarse soils and quarries. Wells also can be contaminated by insects crawling up under well caps and wells drawing in soil particles through air vents.

If there are infants less than six months of age or women of child-bearing age drinking the well water, you should also test for NITRATE.

Nitrate interferes with the blood's ability to carry oxygen, thus causing symptoms of suffocation or "blue baby syndrome" in infants. This is a very serious medical condition. Women of childbearing age also should avoid drinking water high in nitrate because recent research suggests connections between high nitrate water and birth defects and miscarriages.

Nitrate can enter drinking water from many sources, including fertilizer, animal feedlots, sewage drain fields, municipal and industrial wastewater, urban drainage and decaying plant debris. Soil types,

bedrock structure and the direction of groundwater flow also may influence whether nitrate enters into wells.

The laboratory performing your well water tests also can recommend other tests that you might want to have run on your water depending on your well's location, age and nearby land use.



What do I do if the tests show there are problems with my well water?

If test results show you have coliform in your well water, a second sample should be taken to confirm the first result. (Make sure you use proper sampling techniques.) If after re-testing, results still indicate your well water has coliform, contact the laboratory or your local public health agency for information on chlorinating your well. If chlorination doesn't solve the coliform problem, contact a well driller or pump installer (check the Yellow Pages) for help.

If a high level of nitrate is present in your well, contact a well driller or plumber for assistance.