

A Resource for Homeowners with Private Wells

Well owners should test their well water at minimum once per season.

The Public Health Laboratory will test for:

Total Coliform – bacteria always present in animal waste and sewage, but are also found in soil and on vegetation. The presence of these bacteria may indicate surface water is entering your well.

Escherichia coli (E. Coli) – bacteria found only in the digestive systems of people and animals. Their presence in your well water is usually the result of animal or human waste contamination from a nearby source.

How do I test my well water for bacteria?

1. Pick-up a free water sample bottle from [Hastings Prince Edward Public Health](#).
2. Remove any aerator, screen or other attachments from your faucet. Do not take a sample from an outside faucet or garden hose.
3. Disinfect the end of the faucet with an alcohol swab or dilute bleach solution (1 part household bleach to 10 parts water).
4. Turn on cold water and let it run for two to three minutes to remove standing water from your plumbing system.
5. Remove the sample bottle lid. **Do not** touch the inside of lid. **Do not** put the lid down. **Do not** rinse out bottle.
6. Fill the bottle to the fill line marked on the bottle and close the lid firmly.
7. Keep the sample cool (but not frozen) until it is returned to Hastings Prince Edward Public Health. **Complete the bottle's attached form and deliver the sample on the same day it was collected.**

How do I interpret my laboratory results?

Do not apply these interpretations to untreated surface water (e.g. lake water).

Total Coliform	E. Coli	What it means
0	0	SAFE for drinking
1 – 5	0	Three samples with these results, collected 1 to 3 weeks apart, indicate water is SAFE for drinking
>6	0	UNSAFE for drinking unless boiled or treated
--	1 to >80	UNSAFE for drinking unless boiled or treated
Estimated (Est)	--	UNSAFE for drinking unless boiled or treated
Overgrown (O/G)	--	UNSAFE for drinking unless boiled or treated

What do I do if my sample results indicate my water is unsafe?

Immediate measures

- Stop drinking the well water.
- If you want to continue to use your well, **bring the water to a boil for at least one minute** before using it for drinking, making infant formula, juices, ice, recipes, brushing your teeth, rinsing contact lenses and washing food or dishes.
- Or, use an alternate known safe drinking water source such as bottled water or a municipal supply if available.

Longer-term measures

- Disinfect your well and entire household plumbing system. Re-test the water to confirm it is safe to drink.
- Install a drinking water treatment device such as filtration and UV light, chlorinator, etc.
- Chronic problems may require inspection of your well and plumbing system by a licensed well professional.
- Contact Public Health for more assistance.

How do I properly maintain my well?

- Keep potential contamination sources and activities away from your well.
- Ensure the ground around the well casing slopes away from your well.
- Make sure that the well cap or sanitary seal is securely in place and free of cracks and holes.
- Watch for changes in your water's taste, odour and colour.
- Plug and seal any well that is no longer in use – contact a licensed well professional.

For more information contact:

Hastings Prince Edward Public Health

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