



# Your Baby and Well Water

## **Bacteria**

Well water should be routinely tested for bacteria. Bacteria in well water can make one sick, particularly babies and young children.

Testing for bacteria is free and should be done at least three times per year. Public Health has bottles for testing your water and can answer questions about your well and your water test results.

Even if your well water tests safe for drinking it should be boiled before being used for infants under four months of age to make sure it is disinfected. Bring water to a full rolling boil for one minute, let cool then store it in a sterilized, tightly closed container in the refrigerator and use within 3 days.

## **Nitrates**

Nitrate is a salt-like substance which is present in the environment and sometimes found in well water. High nitrate levels in drinking water are often caused by groundwater contamination from animal waste run-off from farms, excessive use of fertilizers, or seepage of human sewage from private septic systems.

Well water should be tested for nitrates, if you are in a susceptible location, to make sure it is safe to use for infants under six months of age. High levels of nitrates can make your baby sick. Babies do not have the ability to properly digest nitrates and may get a condition called “blue baby syndrome” (methemoglobinemia) where they turn blue because of a lack of oxygen. Women who are pregnant should also avoid drinking water high in nitrates.

Testing for nitrates can be done through a licensed lab. See [Ontario's Licensed Labs list](#).

If the nitrate levels in your well water are too high (10 mg/L or more) you will have to use another source of water for preparing food/formula for your baby (eg. municipal water or bottled water).

Boiling water does not remove nitrates and will actually increase the concentration of chemicals in the water.

**Have your well water tested before your baby is born.  
Do not use well water for your baby unless test results tell you it is safe**

### **For more information contact:**

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