



## TESTING YOUR DRINKING WATER WHAT'S IN YOUR WATER CAN HARM YOU

Many diseases are spread through drinking water: cholera, typhoid, hepatitis, and dysentery to name a few. Testing your water and properly disinfecting your well if necessary can prevent waterborne illnesses and limit the spread of disease.

### TESTING FOR BACTERIA

Testing your drinking water for bacteria is the first step—all water samples should be tested by a state-accredited lab. The presence of coliform bacteria indicates contamination of the water supply and may indicate that other harmful organisms are present. Fecal coliform or E. coli bacteria mean the water is contaminated by human or animal waste.

### HOW DO BACTERIA ENTER?

Water systems are subject to normal wear and tear over their lifetime. Bacteria can enter through tiny gaps and cracks in the water lines, holding or pressure tanks, or other aging and worn out parts, which must be replaced. In Kitsap County, it is rare that the groundwater is contaminated.

### HOW OFTEN TO TEST?

You should test your water yearly through a state-certified lab. Water from private wells should be tested for bacteria every year. Other times to test are if you lose water pressure, have a broken pipe, or after an earthquake.

### HOW & WHERE TO SAMPLE?

The lab you use for testing will provide a collection bottle with instructions for you to follow.

Usually the best place to gather a sample is from an outside metal hose bib that can be sterilized with a lighter flame. Remove any screens or gaskets, and run cold water through the faucet for several minutes. **DO NOT** rinse out the bottle before collecting the sample.



KITSAP PUBLIC  
HEALTH DISTRICT

345 6th Street  
Suite 300  
Bremerton, WA  
98337

360-337-5235  
360-337-5291 (fax)

## WHAT IF MY WELL HAS COLIFORM BACTERIA?

A repeat sample should be collected as soon as possible to verify the problem. If the new sample has bacteria, proceed as follows, based on your water source:

*HAND-DUG WELLS.* These almost always are positive for coliform bacteria. The usual solution is to have a disinfection system installed or rely on another water source. Because water treatment systems vary in cost, you'll want to get more than one estimate. It may be necessary to submit an engineered design to us for approval.

*DRILLED WELLS.* Contamination can occur in many places, from openings in the top to aging parts and equipment to a failed pressure tank bladder. If an inspection reveals that your system is sound, you'll want to disinfect the well and water distribution system.

## WHAT IF MY SAMPLE HAS FECAL BACTERIA?

In this case you must boil your drinking water or use bottled water until the problem is corrected. Collect a repeat sample as soon as possible to verify the results. If ANY bacteria are present, you must inspect and disinfect the water source and system.

## DISINFECTING A WELL AND WATER SYSTEM

These instructions apply to dug and drilled wells:

1. Start with a new gallon of liquid chlorine bleach (5% sodium hypochlorite) with NO additives.
2. Remove the well casing cover.
3. Add one-half gallon of liquid bleach to the well.
4. Connect a hose to the faucet nearest the well. If this isn't possible, proceed to step No. 6.
5. Turn on an outside faucet and run the water on the ground until you can smell the bleach. Use the hose to wash down the inner wall of the well, protecting your eyes and clothing. When finished, turn off the faucet, remove the hose, and close up the well.
6. Turn on an outside house faucet and run it until you smell chlorine; then turn it off.
7. Repeat step No. 6 with all outside and inside faucets. Moving the chlorinated water through the system completes the disinfecting.
8. Let the chlorine remain in the pipes overnight. If possible, don't use any water during this time.
9. The next day, using outside faucets, flush as much water through the system as possible. It's best to connect a hose, allowing the water to seep into the ground. Keep water going into your septic system to a minimum.
10. Be sure to flush showers before use, and refrain from washing colored clothes for a day or two.
11. Expect your water to be cloudy for one or two days. It will take about five days before the chlorine smell is completely gone.
12. Chlorine must be completely flushed from the system before collecting samples for repeat bacteria testing. You can retest with a chlorine test kit, available at pool or spa supply stores.

## QUESTIONS?

Call us at 360-337-5235.