



Frequently Asked Questions About Well Water Testing

Why should I have my well water supply tested?

Typically, groundwater is naturally clean and safe for using, because the top layers of soil act as a natural filter. However, contamination may occur following improper installation of well casings or caps, after a break in the casing, or as a result of contaminated surface water entering the well. Contamination can also occur if water wells are drilled in fractured bedrock without enough protective soil and with less than the recommended minimum casing length. Contamination can also occur over time as more and more wells are drilled into the same aquifer (water-bearing layer). Water wells should be properly maintained and the water tested regularly to ensure the safety and quality of your water supply, and to prevent the possibility of illness.

What tests can be performed on my well water supply?

There are generally two types of tests that can be performed on your well water supply – a Bacteriological Analysis and a Chemical Analysis. The Bacteriological Analysis determines the microbiological quality of the water supply by looking for the presence of certain bacteria that are indicative of fecal (sewage or manure) contamination.

The Chemical Analysis, on the other hand, determines the concentration of naturally occurring minerals (or chemicals) in your well water supply. Most of these minerals only affect the aesthetic quality of the water (taste, odor and color), however, there are a few minerals that can adversely affect human health.

How often should I test my well water supply?

Bacteriological Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wells greater than 50 feet deep – 2 times per year • Wells less than 50 feet deep – 4 times per year
Chemical Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every 2 - 5 years

What time of the year should I test my well water supply?

Generally, the best time to test your well water supply is in the Spring and Fall. However, testing can be done at any time throughout the year. It is important to note that if you experience a dramatic change in the clarity, color, odor or taste of the water, it is strongly recommended that you stop drinking it until bacteriological analysis and well maintenance show that it is safe to drink.

Are there other circumstances that might warrant testing of my well water supply?

Yes. Testing of your well water supply is also recommended under the following conditions:

- After an extended dry spell (bacteriological only)
- Following heavy rains (bacteriological only)
- After lengthy periods of non-use, usually more than a year (bacteriological & chemical)
- If you are expecting a newborn in the house (bacteriological & chemical)
- If you are new to the house/property (bacteriological & chemical)
- If you have never had the water tested before (bacteriological & chemical)
- If household members experience gastrointestinal illness and you suspect the water (bacteriological only)

Where should I start if I want my well water supply tested?

Call or drop in to one of our local Community Health Centres or Health Units – they are generally open between 8:30 AM and 4:30 PM (excluding lunch hour) from Monday to Friday. We will provide you with the correct sampling containers and instructions on how to properly collect and submit your water sample(s). Water samples may also be submitted through private laboratories, at the owner's expense.

Will all water samples be accepted at a Community Health Centre or Health Unit?

No, only water samples intended for human consumption will be accepted at our Community Health Centres or Health Units and tested at no cost to you, provided you have collected and submitted them according to our procedures.

Water samples will not be accepted if it is:

- not for human consumption,
- for financial transaction purposes (such as mortgage approval),
- for the detection of dissolved gases,
- to determine the effectiveness of water treatment equipment, or
- for agricultural purposes.

Water samples collected for these reasons should be submitted through a private laboratory, at the owner's expense.

How long does it take for the results to come back, and will I be notified?

All lab reports are processed through the Environmental Public Health office in Drumheller, and then they are mailed to you via Canada Post. The average time it takes, from when you drop off the sample at your local Community Health Centre or Health Unit to when you receive the report in the mail, is as follows:

- Bacteriological analysis: usually within 7-10 business days.
- Chemical Analysis: usually within 8-10 weeks, depending on the time of year.

In instances where your bacteriological water sample is determined to be unsatisfactory, a Public Health Inspector will contact you by phone, usually within 3 days of sampling.

Who can I contact if I have questions about testing my well water supply?

If you have questions, please contact a Public Health Inspector in your area.

Camrose (780) 679-2980 ♦ Drayton Valley (780) 542-4415 ♦ Drumheller (403) 823-3341 ♦ Hanna (403) 854-5236
Lamont (780) 895-2211 ♦ Olds (403) 556-8441 ♦ Ponoka (403) 783-4491 ♦ Red Deer (403) 356-6366
Rocky Mountain House (403) 845-3030 ♦ Sedgewick (780) 384-3652 ♦ Stettler (403) 742-3326
Sylvan Lake (403) 887-2241 ♦ Tofield (780) 662-3984 ♦ Vermilion (780) 853-5270
Wainwright (780) 842-4077 ♦ Wetaskiwin (780) 361-4333