



## Why Test Your Water?

### **Do you know if your water is safe to drink?**

- If you are one of the 53 million Americans who use wells, cisterns or springs as your drinking water source, you have a unique responsibility to safeguard the quality of the water your family consumes. Because water quality can be affected by many variables, the first step is to test your water.

### **Did you know?**

- **[Private wells not protected by Federal regulation](#)**  
Private wells are not regulated under the Federal Safe Drinking Water Act. It is the responsibility of the private well owner to ensure the quality of their water source.
- **[EPA recommends annual testing for private well owners](#)**  
The EPA recommends that well owners test their water annually and be aware of potential health problems.
- **[Water contamination – Natural and man made](#)**  
Water quality is dependent on many things including proximity to industrial activities, landfills, soil type, local geology, local use of pesticides, herbicides and other chemicals and well construction.
- **[Your water & your health](#)**  
Water is a vital component to maintaining good health so it is important to make sure your water is of high quality.
- **[Contamination often goes unnoticed](#)**  
Underground water sources are always at risk of various contaminations. The two most common contaminants are sewage and chemical. With the exception of a few parasites, most cases of water contamination may not be seen with the naked eye. In order to determine if water is safe for drinking, laboratory tests must be performed.

### **How do I get started?**

In order to get the best quality of water, the following steps should be adhered to **before** drilling water wells.

- Hire only professional licensed well drillers. For a listing of Licensed Water Well Drillers or more information, contact: Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation at (512) 463-6599 or (800) 803-9202 or <http://www.license.state.tx.us/>
- Comply with all sanitary easement requirements. The minimum spacing requirements for wells are:
  - 50 ft from the property line,
  - 50' from the septic tank,
  - 100' from a septic system drain field,
  - 100' from an aerobic spray area
- Comply with all platting requirements.

### **How often should I have water from my well tested?**

All Food Service Establishments utilizing a private well are required by Texas State law to have their water tested at once every four weeks.

There is not a law pertaining to residential families using well water as their source of drinking water. It is strongly recommended that homeowners have their private wells water tested at least every 180 days.

### **What type of test is performed?**

The most common test for determining contamination is **Chromogenic/Fluorogenic Colilert**. This test utilizes a microbiological method for determining the existence of Bacteria (Coliform and E. Coli.).

**Note:** This test will not determine chemicals or other substances such as lead or nitrites. If you are concerned about chemicals or other possible contaminants in your water, you should contact a private laboratory or contact a private water quality company. The best reference for locating a private laboratory is the yellow pages under Environmental Services, Laboratories or Chemical Lab.

### **Where can I obtain an “approved sampling container”?**

Approved water sample bottles, instructions and related forms are available in the Environmental Health Department office, located at 4520 Reading Road, Rosenberg, [Directions Link Here](#) Approved sample bottles may also be obtained from any state or private water testing facility. Do not collect the sample in an unapproved container; do not use jars or other containers from home or other sources.

### **How do I get my sample tested?**

Water samples may be submitted to the Fort Bend County Environmental Health Department on Wednesday between the hours of 8:00am and 12pm. As a courtesy, Fort Bend County delivers water samples to the City of Houston Water and Dairy Laboratory for testing.

If using the County Environmental Health Department courtesy courier, submit your water sample within 24 hours of collection.

If you cannot deliver your water sample to our office on Wednesday **before noon**, you may deliver the sample directly to the City of Houston lab located at

1115 South Brasewood  
Houston, TX 77030  
713-558-3474

### **How much does it cost?**

A cost of \$8.00 per sample is required at the time of submittal (check or money order only, payable to City of Houston.) Sorry, cash is NOT accepted.

**How can I obtain information about the water in a municipal utility district (MUD)?**

If you live in a subdivision or area that is connected to a municipal utility district (MUD), and you have concerns or want information regarding the quality of the water, you may contact the water provider and submit a request for a copy of the required yearly analysis, or contact the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). You can visit their website at [www.tceq.state.tx.us](http://www.tceq.state.tx.us) or [http://www.tceq.state.tx.us/nav/util\\_water/](http://www.tceq.state.tx.us/nav/util_water/)

**Procedures for submitting water well samples for testing:**

**Obtain an approved sterile sampling container.** These bottles may be picked up from any state water testing facility or the Environmental Health Department. Do not use jars or other containers from home or other sources.

**Select a faucet or tap nearest the well.** Use cold water. Most wells have a faucet located on the water line exiting the tank. Samples should come directly from the well or the tank. If a water softening or filtration system is connected to the water source, the water sample should be taken from a tap or faucet prior to these types of systems.

**Remove anything attached to the faucet.** Hoses, aerators, or anything attached to the sample faucet may contain contamination.

**You want fresh well water in your sample.** Turn on the tap or faucet. Let it run for at 5 to 10 minutes so that the well pump is activated and you obtain a fresh supply of water from the well.

**Do not get your hands dirty.** While the water source is running, wash your hands thoroughly with liquid soap and water. **Do not** handle animals, place anything in your mouth, change diapers, use the bathroom, or touch anything that may contaminate your hands and cause the water sample to become inadvertently contaminated.

**Turn off the faucet and sanitize it.** Sanitize a **metal** faucet by heating it with a cigarette lighter or a propane torch. Heat the faucet until it is dry and the handle is warm to touch. If the sample is to be taken from a plastic or chrome faucet such as your kitchen sink, **do not heat it.** Swab inside and around the opening of the faucet with a cotton ball soaked with alcohol, or use a spray bottle containing a water and bleach mixture.

**Collect the sample.** Turn the faucet back on to a slow trickle, allow to run for at least 60 seconds. Carefully open the water bottle making sure not to put your fingers inside the cap, bottle, or on the threads. Take caution to not breathe into the bottle. Fill the bottle to the neck and then secure the cap. While filling the bottle, do not lose or rinse out the white tablet inside the bottle, its purpose is to neutralize any chlorine in the water sample.

**Protect the sample.** Keep the sample out of direct sunlight and away from heat. It is recommended that you put the closed water bottle sample in a refrigerator or cooler until you are ready to bring the sample in.

**Fill out the sample form.** Make sure the information is complete. If you have a chlorinated well, make sure to mark "test the chlorine residual." After completing the form, include a check or money order payable to the City of Houston in the amount of \$16.50. No cash. Wrap the form and payment around the sample bottle and secure it with a rubber band. If you have an account with the City of Houston, include your account number on the sample form.

**Get the sample to the lab.** If using the County Environmental Health Department courtesy courier, submit your water sample within 24 hours of collecting it from the well. If delivering a sample by other means, submit your water sample within 30 hours. Laboratory results will be sent to you from the City of

Houston within 10 days. If you do not receive your results within 2 weeks, contact the lab by telephone with the following information: the date the sample was submitted, the county in which the sample was collected, the complete return address on the form. If testing results are needed for a property closing, submit a FAXING RESULTS form with the water sample.

**What the laboratory report means.** If coliform organisms are **not found**, the water is bacteriologically safe to drink. If coliform organisms **are found**, the water sample contains bacteria commonly found in sewage, which may include typhoid or other disease producing bacteria. Contaminated water should not be used for drinking, washing teeth, cleaning wounds, or washing vegetables that are to be eaten raw. Advice is to use commercially bottled water until the supply is decontaminated. Contaminated water may be boiled for a minimum of 20 minutes before using. Clear water may be treated with 6 to 10 drops of household chlorine bleach per gallon of water at least 30 minutes before use.

**How to treat a contaminated water well.** Obtain 1 gallon of chlorine bleach. Dilute the bleach with several gallons of water and put it directly into the well casing. Connect a garden hose to a faucet near the well and let it flow into the well casing until an odor of bleach comes out of the hose. Open every other faucet on the cold water side, allowing them to run until the odor of bleach is detected in the water. Then open every faucet on the hot water side for at least 15 seconds to allow the bleach to flush the line. Let the bleach remain in the well casing and plumbing for at least 4 hours, or preferably overnight. Then open one outside faucet and let the water run until the bleach odor is gone. Then flush each inside faucet; first on the cold water side, and then on the hot water side. Wait 3 days before submitting a new water sample to the laboratory. **It is not unusual for this treatment to be required 3 or 4 times before no contamination is found by laboratory test.** All wells should be tested for contamination at least once per year.

**For More Information:**

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ.) [www.tceq.state.tx.us](http://www.tceq.state.tx.us).

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<http://www.uldrinkwell.com/>