

# Hydrogen Sulfide and Sulfur Bacteria in Well Water

Does your water have a “rotten egg” smell? You may have sulfur bacteria.



**Hydrogen sulfide gas is caused by sulfur bacteria.** The water has a distinctive “rotten egg” smell or taste but is usually safe. Sulfur bacteria can be in plumbing, water heaters, well components and groundwater sources.

## Sulfur in your home

Sulfur can be a nuisance in your home. You may have sulfur in your well water if you notice:

- Rotten egg smell
- Black and yellow stain on silverware and metal plumbing fixtures
- Corroded metal piping and other metal parts of the water system
- Slime that can clog pipes, wells and irrigation systems.

## Sulfur and your health

Sulfur is common in drinking water and is usually safe. For some people, it may cause diarrhea and dehydration. Babies are most likely to get diarrhea from sulfur in the water. Your body may adjust over time to sulfur and symptoms may stop.

## Finding the source

Begin by smelling the water coming out of both your cold and hot faucets after you have been out of the home for a few hours. Then follow the chart on the right.

## Testing and treatment

A test for hydrogen sulfide or sulfur bacteria is not usually necessary. However, in rare instances, the gas may be from sewage or other pollution. To be safe, test your well water for coliform bacteria and nitrate. To find an accredited laboratory, visit <https://go.usa.gov/xdJHk>.

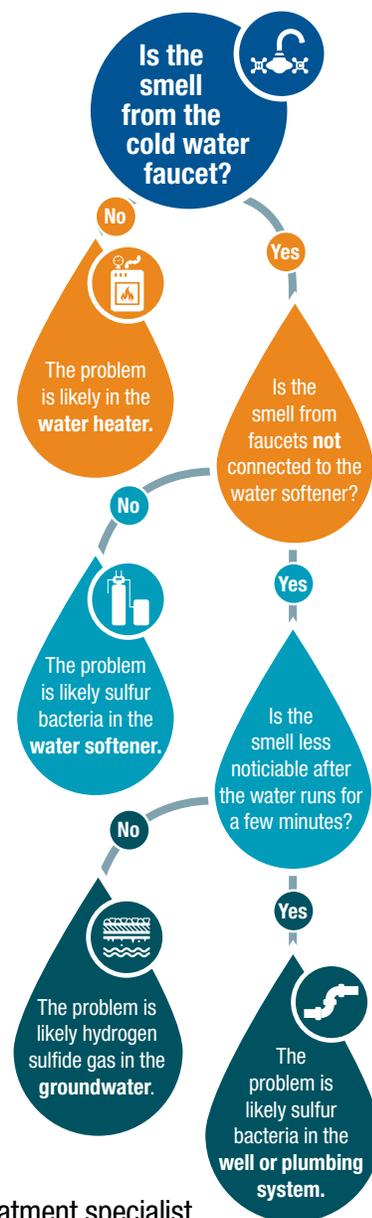
A variety of treatment options are available, depending on the sulfur's source. They may include:

- Replacing specific water fixtures
- Repairing your water heater
- Chlorinating the well, and
- Other possibilities.

## For questions about:

- **Health effects of sulfur:** Call 971-673-0440.
- **Water treatment:** Find a local plumber or water treatment specialist.
- **A domestic well:** Find a licensed well professional at <https://go.usa.gov/xdJH9>.

For more information on treatment options for sulfur, visit <https://go.usa.gov/xdJH8>.



Oregon Health Authority

PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION  
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[www.healthoregon.org/wells](http://www.healthoregon.org/wells)

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Content for this document was adapted from the Minnesota Well Management program resources.