

Coliform bacteria in well water: What you should know

Coliform bacteria are part of a broad group of bacteria found in soil, water and vegetation. Some coliform, called “fecal coliform,” is also found in the intestines of humans and other warm-blooded animals. Coliform can enter your well through groundwater, surface water run-off, cracked or broken well parts, poor construction and leaking septic tanks.



You should test for coliform bacteria at least once a year.

Coliform bacteria and your health

Presence of coliform in your water could indicate the presence of fecal coliform such as *E. coli*. If fecal coliform or *E. coli* is in your water, you may have diarrhea, cramps, nausea, headaches or other symptoms. Infants, young children and people with compromised immune systems are at a higher risk.

Coliform bacteria and your well water

Testing for coliform bacteria and *E. coli* is the most common way to know if your drinking water is contaminated and unsafe to drink. Contact an accredited laboratory for specific instructions on how to collect, store and send the sample. The test will cost between \$25 and \$40. To find accredited labs in Oregon, visit www.healthoregon.org/wells.

If your water tests positive for coliform or *E. coli*, you should switch to bottled water or another source of safe drinking water and seek treatment options.

For more information:

- Private well owners with health-related questions about coliform bacteria in their water, well maintenance and testing recommendations can call 971-673-0440 or email domestic.wells@dhsosha.state.or.us.
- For questions about treatment options for your domestic well, contact the drinking water specialist at [your local health department](#) (<http://tinyurl.com/DWcontacts>).

Interpreting your coliform bacteria results

Bacteria result	Water use	Recommendation
Absent (coliform and <i>E. coli</i>)	SAFE for all uses.	Test water at least once a year.
Coliform present, <i>E. coli</i> absent	NOT SAFE for drinking, food preparation, brushing teeth and use in eyes.	If coliform bacteria is in the water, your well may easily become contaminated with more harmful bacteria, such as <i>E. coli</i> , at any time. Follow the instructions below.
Present (coliform and <i>E. coli</i>)	SAFE for other domestic uses and irrigating gardens.	Boil your water before using or use bottled water (or other safe drinking water source). Supervise children to help them avoid swallowing water while bathing, brushing teeth, etc. Although you should always wash produce, remember to wash garden produce with boiled or bottled water. Inspect your well head and well parts for repairs and contact your local drinking water specialist for treatment advice.

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You can get this document in other languages, large print, braille or a format you prefer. Contact Domestic Well Safety Program at 971-673-0440. We accept all relay calls or you can dial 711.

