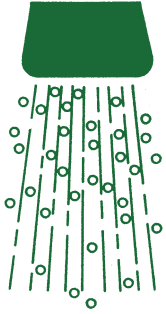




Well Water Safety



If you get your drinking water from a private well, you may have thought about having it tested. Shallow wells (less than 50 feet deep) are the ones most likely to be contaminated, but even deeper wells may have problems.

What might be in the water?

- **Microorganisms:** Bacteria from human and animal waste are a sign of unsanitary conditions. They may also signal the presence of more dangerous bacteria, viruses, or parasites.
- **Organic chemicals:** Pesticides, industrial solvents, gasoline, and other pollutants may get into the drinking water.
- **Nitrate:** Fertilizers and sewage contribute to nitrate in the water. Nitrate may cause a rare form of anemia in infants. It also may be a sign of other water problems.

- **Lead:** Although lead solder was banned in 1986, lead may be present in fixtures. Some plumbers continue to use lead solder despite the ban. Lead can affect anyone, but it is most dangerous to pregnant women, infants and children.
- **Iron** from natural deposits or galvanized pipes can stain fixtures and have an unpleasant taste, but there are no adverse health effects.
- **Copper:** Your fixtures may be stained blue/green if you have copper pipes. This is a sign of a corrosive water supply.



Consider testing your water if...

- You live near a chemical plant or agricultural area;
- You note a change in your water's color, taste or smell;
- Your water or fixtures are discolored (red, brown, green);
- Laundry or dishes become stained; or
- Pipes or fixtures become corroded.

(over for more info...)



How can water be tested?

Laboratories certified to test water in the state of Maryland can perform the tests you need. Laboratories are listed in the Yellow Pages under “Laboratories, Testing”.

- Use only a laboratory which is certified by the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene’s Laboratory Administration or by the federal Environmental Protection Agency.
- Do not rely on tests by a company which sells water treatment equipment.
- If a test shows that expensive corrective work needs to be done, get a second test before doing anything.
- Your local health department will interpret your test results if you are unsure of their meaning.

How can health problems be prevented?

- Always use cold water for cooking or drinking and to mix juice or infant formula. Water from the hot water faucet may contain too much copper or lead.
- Before using water which has been standing in the pipes for more than two hours, let the water run until it feels cold (about one gallon of water). You can use this water for plants or to wash dishes.
- If you use water to make infant formula or juice for babies under six months old, have your water tested for nitrates. If nitrates are found, do not use it for these purposes.
- Several types of water purifiers are available. If a water test shows that there is a problem, check with an expert before

buying a water purifier. No single device can get rid of all contaminants in your water.

- Howard County well water has negligible levels of fluoride. Ask your dentist or doctor for information on fluoride supplements for infants and children.

For more information

Call one of these numbers:

Howard County Health Department: 410-313-2640 (TDD 410-313-2323) www.hchealth.org

Maryland Department of the Environment, Water Supply Program: 410-537-3702

National Sanitation Foundation (for advice on water purifiers): 800-NSF-MARK



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