



Information for Private Well Owners with Potential Livestock Contamination

This handout provides an overview of how DNR will respond to potential livestock contamination in your private well and what you can do.

Potential causes of bacterial contamination

Melting of snow and frost in the ground, rain events, manure management practices, poorly constructed or degrading wells, improperly constructed or degrading septic systems, vulnerable geology and other land use practices may contribute to bacterial contamination in private wells. If you have not already done so, you should first sample and test your well water for bacteria using a DATCP-certified lab.

What will the DNR do when livestock manure contamination is suspected?

DNR responds to reports of changes in well water quality and may sample your well. Samples may be collected to investigate the source and extent of impacts. DNR also works with your County's Land Conservation office and investigates agricultural runoff conditions on adjacent properties. County Public Health notifies well owners of potential health risks from drinking bacteria contaminated well water and responds to individual health concerns.

When will I get the test results for my well?

If DNR sampled your well they will provide you with your final results as soon as they are available. Some results are available to DNR within 2-4 business days, while other tests take up to 3 weeks. If you did your own testing you'll receive those results directly from the lab. Contact the lab for an estimated date of when your results will be available.

What do the test results mean? Can I drink my water? Can I shower or bathe?

If your well water is discolored or smells like manure, do not drink the water, avoid direct skin contact and only use it for flushing. If your test results are positive for *E. coli*, do not drink the water. Do not use it to brush teeth, wash dishes or to prepare food. If *E. coli* concentrations are considered high by Wisconsin Department of Health Services standards; the water should not be used for showering or bathing. Individuals who are medically compromised should not shower or bathe with water contaminated with *E. coli* at any level. For more information please contact your local health department.

What should I do now?

If you have any concerns about your well water, stop drinking the water and find an alternate source of water to drink. Once the appearance of your well water has returned to normal, arrange to have your well evaluated and/or disinfected by a licensed well driller or pump installer. Before you consume the water again, have the well sampled after disinfection and sent to a lab of your choice to assure it is free of bacteria.

Does my well need to be replaced?

You can hire a licensed driller or pump installer to evaluate your well. By reviewing the original well construction report, inspecting your water supply system for code compliance, evaluating

the finished depth and checking the construction of your well, the well professional may develop a recommendation about the need to recondition or replace your well.

Is there financial help available?

If there is evidence of bacterial contamination caused by livestock from the DNR collected water samples, DNR will complete an investigation and may declare an “area of special eligibility” for compensation for well contamination in approximately 30 to 45 days. The grant money may be used for filling and sealing old wells, drilling and constructing a new well or installing a treatment system. There are family income limitations of \$65,000/year to qualify for a grant. More information on the Well Compensation program can be found on DNR’s website: <http://dnr.wi.gov/aid/wellcompensation.html>.

For more information, contact:

- Health-related questions – Your County Health Department
- Well and financial help questions – The DNR Water Supply Specialist for your County



The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources provides equal opportunity in its employment, programs, services and functions under an Affirmative Action Plan. If you have any questions, please write to: Equal Opportunity Office, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

This publication is available in alternative format (large print, Braille, audio tape, etc.) upon request. Please call (608) 266-1054 for more information.