



## 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 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 are 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 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends that well owners test their water annually and be aware of potential health problems.

- **Water contamination can be natural and manmade.**

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 impacts 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 2 most common contaminants are sewage and chemical. With the exception of a few parasites, most cases of water contamination cannot be seen with the naked eye. In order to determine if water is safe for drinking, laboratory testing must be performed.



## How do I get started?

In order to get the best quality water, the following steps should be taken *before* drilling water wells:

- Hire only professional, licensed well drillers. For a listing of Licensed Water Well Drillers contact: Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation at 512-463-6599 or 1-800-803-9202, or online at <http://www.license.state.tx.us/>.
- Comply with all sanitary easement requirements. The minimum spacing requirements for wells:
  - 50 feet from the property line
  - 50 feet from the septic tank
  - 100 feet from the septic system drain field
  - 100 feet 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 least 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 well's water tested at least every 180 days.

## What type of testing is performed?

The most common test from determining contamination is *chromogenic/fluorogenic colilert*. This test utilizes a microbiological method for determining the existence of bacteria (*coliform and e. coli*).

Please 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 private water quality company. The best reference for finding a private laboratory is in 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 at the Fort Bend County Environmental Health Department office located at: [4520 Reading Road, Rosenberg, 77471](#). Approved sample 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 Fort Bend County Environmental Health Department on Wednesday between 8:00am and 12:00pm. As a courtesy, Fort Bend County delivers water samples to the City of Houston Water and Dairy Laboratory for testing. If using Fort Bend 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 Braeswood, Houston, 77030](#). The City of Houston lab can be contacted at 713-558-3474.

### **How much does water testing cost?**

The cost for water testing is \$16.50 per sample. Payment is required at the time of submittal. Check or money order payable to City of Houston is accepted. Sorry NO cash.

### **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 MUD and you have concerns or want information regarding the water quality, 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) at [www.tceq.state.tx.us](http://www.tceq.state.tx.us).

### **Procedures for Submitting Water Well Sample for Testing:**

**Obtain an approved sterile sampling container.** These bottles may be picked up any state water testing facility or [Fort Bend County Environmental Health Department](#). Do not use jars or other containers from home or other sources. Approved bottles contain a chlorine neutralizing tablet.

**Select a faucet or tap nearest the well.** Most wells have a faucet located on the line exiting the tank. Samples should come directly from the well or 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 located before these systems.

**Remove anything attached to the faucet.** Hoses, aerators, or anything attached to the sample faucet may be contaminated and must be removed.

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

**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 a diaper, 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 lighter or a propane torch. Heat the faucet until it is dry and the handle is warm to the touch. If the faucet is plastic or chrome, do not use heat to sanitize. Swab inside and around the opening of the faucet with



a cotton ball soaked in 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 the water to run for at least 60 seconds. Carefully open the water bottle making sure not to put your fingers inside the cap, bottle, or the threads. Take caution not to breathe on the bottle. Fill the bottle to the neck and secure the cap. While filling the bottle, do not lose or rinse out the white tablet inside the bottle. The white tablet is needed 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. The sample must be turned in for testing within 24-30 hours of being taken depending on which lab is being used.

**Fill out the forms for water sampling.** Make sure all information is complete. If you have a chlorinated wells make sure and mark "test the chlorine residual." If you have an account with the City of Houston, include your account number on the sample form. Payment is required at time of service, check or money order payable to the City of Houston in the amount of \$16.50. No cash will be accepted. Wrap the form and the payment around the sample bottle and secure with a rubber band.

**Get the sample to the lab.** If using Fort Bend County Environmental Health Department courtesy courier, submit your water sample with 24 hours of collecting it from the well. If delivering a sample by other means, submit you 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, 713-558-3474, with the following information: date 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 results mean.** 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, brushing teeth, cleaning wounds, or washing vegetables that are to be eaten raw. Advice is to use commercially bottles water until the supply is decontaminated. Contaminated water may be made safe by being boiled for a minimum of 20 minutes before use. Clear water may be treated with 6 to 10 drops of household chlorine bleach per gallon of water for at least 30 minutes before use.

**Treat contaminated water well.** Obtain 1 gallon of chlorine bleach. Dilute the bleach with several gallons of water and put 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 faucet on the cold water side, allowing them t 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 by first letting the cold side run and then the hot side run. Wait 3 days before submitting a new water sample to the laboratory. All wells should be tested for contamination at least once per year.

Please note: It is not unusual for treatment to be required 3 or 4 times before no contamination is found by laboratory tests.

### **For more information:**

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

Texas Dept of Licensing and Registration [www.license.state.tx.us](http://www.license.state.tx.us) or 512-463-6599 or 1-800-803-9202

Well Water Testing [www.uldrinkwell.com](http://www.uldrinkwell.com)