Lawrence · Douglas County
PUBLIC HEALTH
Advancing Health for All

Water Wells & Contaminants

Your questions answered

Does the Health Department test water wells?

Yes, an environmental staff member comes to your home and takes samples. Please call 785-843-3060 to submit your request and a $40 fee, or you can complete the application and payment online. The Department only screens drinking water for coliform bacteria, *E. coli* bacteria and nitrates.

Can I bring in my own water well sample?

No, the Health Department no longer accepts water well samples brought to us.

What can I do if my well tests positive for bacteria and/or nitrates?

- If your well tests positive for bacteria including coliform bacteria and *E. coli,* you can shock chlorinate your well. You will not be able to use your household water for 24 hours during the chlorination process. Directions for this process can be found here.
- If your well tests positive for bacteria, you can also install a water treatment system such as an ultraviolet radiation (UV) light, chlorination or ozonation systems.
- If your well tests positive for nitrates, you can install a water treatment system such as reverse osmosis, ion exchange or distillation systems. Do **not** boil water that tests positive for nitrates because this will increase nitrate levels.

Can I drink the water if it tests positive?

The Health Department does not consider the water safe to consume.

I shocked my well, now what?

Please wait at least one week after shocking the well to have the Health Department's environmental staff resample your water. There is an additional $60 fee for a retest, which covers the cost of materials and lab tests.

What are the health concerns for drinking water that tests positive for bacteria and/or nitrates?

- The presence of coliform bacteria indicates that a source of bacterial contamination exists, and therefore it is possible for disease-causing organisms to be present. Water containing coliform bacteria should be considered unsafe for consumption.
- Water containing nitrate levels above 10 parts per million (ppm) is unsafe for use by pregnant women or infants less than one year old, and another source of water should be used for drinking, cooking, or making formula.
- Nitrates can cause blue baby syndrome (methemoglobinemia) and can be fatal to infants. Blue baby syndrome decreases the ability of blood to carry oxygen throughout the body to vital tissues.

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Water Wells & Contaminants ...Continued

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What is the drinking water standard for nitrates?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has set safe drinking water standards at 10 ppm for nitrates.

What causes contamination in my well?

Well water contamination primarily comes from septic tank wastes, fertilizers, animal wastes, industrial wastes, and other non-point source pollutants.

How can I reduce well water contamination in the future?

Identify potential sources of contamination on or near your property. Make sure your septic system is working properly, your well casing is effectively sealed with no cracks, and no sources such as pesticides/fuels/fertilizers are uphill from your well.

How often should I get my well tested?

Kansas Department of Health and Environment and the Health Department recommend water well testing annually for bacteria and every 3 years for nitrates.

Do I need to use bottled water if I have a water filter?

It depends — most household filters are not designed to remove bacteria and nitrates. It is recommended to test your well water every 1-3 years to ensure it is considered safe to drink.

Do you have a list of labs that test for other contaminants?

The KDHE provides a list of certified laboratories here: http://www.kdheks.gov/waterwell/.

Where can I learn more about my private well?

- KDHE provides more information about sampling, contamination, and further lab testing here: http://www.kdheks.gov/wellwateraware/index.htm.
- KDHE has further resources regarding their private well program here: http://www.kdheks.gov/waterwell/.
- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) also has additional resources regarding private wells: https://www.epa.gov/privatewells.

** This fact sheet is for information only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation. If you have any questions about the disease described above or think that you may have an infection, consult with your health care provider.*