

Health Unit Media Release

September 14, 2011



KNOW YOUR WELL

If you live in a rural area, chances are your family's daily water supply comes from a well on your property. If you haven't already, get acquainted with your well. It's the first step in doing everything you can to protect the quality of your well water and the groundwater we all share. As a well owner and someone who wants to ensure the water your family is drinking is safe, you need to properly maintain your well to prevent it from being damaged, cracked or contaminated. Contaminants or foreign materials should never have access to your well.

When it comes to wells, think watertight!

Is your Water Supply "Highly Vulnerable"?

The most common types of vulnerable water supplies are:

- below-grade wells, including well pits and buried wells, where the top of the well casing is below ground level, are highly vulnerable to contamination from natural gas build-up, vermin and the surface water that can collect and drain into them
- cisterns, which are reservoirs used to collect and store water, pose risks because they contain surface water and otherwise untreated water
 - *Tip:* Never use an old well as a cistern, as contaminants from rain water or tile drains will eventually reach groundwater.
- groundwater springs, where the water table meets the earth's surface, may easily be exposed to contaminants from human activities nearby, and the water may only have been in the ground for a short time
- surface water trench systems, also known as shore wells, pose risks to human health if water is untreated (e.g., from rivers or lakes, or from structures that indirectly collect surface water)
 - *Tip:* All untreated surface water is unfit for human consumption. If you think your water supply may be "highly vulnerable", don't use it, if at all possible. Try to find alternatives. If you can't, make sure you test your water, treat it (see Information Sheet, Choosing a Water Treatment System), and consider relocating your well.

A Rule-of-Thumb for Assessing the Risk of Problems with Well Water Quality:

- The deeper the well... The longer it takes surface water to enter the well... The lower the risk of contamination.
- The risk of contamination also decreases the farther away the well is from potential sources of contamination.

Testing your Well Water

Testing your well water for bacterial contamination is a smart way to monitor the quality of your well. Wells should be tested at least twice a year and additionally after times of heavy rain. Sample bottles are provided free of charge to homeowners with private wells at any of our Health Unit offices located in Smiths Falls, Brockville, Kemptville and Gananoque. Sample bottles are also available at the following municipal offices: Athens, Beckwith,

Drummond/North Elmsley, Edwardsburg/Cardinal, Elizabethtown/Kitley, Lanark Highlands, Leeds and the 1000 Islands, Merrickville-Wolford, Mississippi Mills, Montague, Perth, Rideau Lakes and Tay Valley, Westport. Water samples bottles must be returned to any health unit office from Monday to Thursday. Water testing takes place at our public health laboratories in Kingston and Ottawa. For specific office information and hours please visit our website at www.healthunit.org.

If you suspect that your water may be bacteriologically unsafe for drinking we recommend using an alternate safe source of water until you have 3 consecutive satisfactory samples taken a week apart. This can confirm the safety of your well water.

If you require help interpreting your water sample please feel free to consult with our website at www.healthunit.org or by calling the Health ACTION Line at 1-800-660-5853 or 613-345-5685 and speaking with a Public Health Inspector.

-30-

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