



Well water sampling and results

How to sample your well:

- Refer to "How to Samples Your Well Water for Bacteria" on Ottawa Public Health's website: [Free Well Water Testing - Ottawa Public Health](#).
- Private well owners are encouraged to test their well water every spring, summer, and fall.
- Do not sample from an outside tap or garden hose, as there is higher potential for contamination at these sources which may result in a lab result positive for total coliform and/or *E.coli*.
- The correct sampling procedure includes the removal of any aerator, screen, or other attachment from your faucet. If this cannot be done, sample from a different **indoor** tap with no aerator.
- Disinfect the end of the faucet spout with an alcohol swab, or a diluted bleach solution (1 part household bleach to 10 parts water).
- Run the cold water for 2 to 3 minutes prior to collecting a sample.
- Immediately refrigerate the sample and deliver it to a drop-off location within 12 hours. Drop off locations can be found on the Ottawa Public Health webpage: [Well Water Testing- Pick up and Drop off Locations](#).
- Public Health Ontario (PHO) Laboratories only test for the indicators of bacterial contamination (coliforms and *E. coli*). Samples sent to this lab will not be tested for any other contaminants (e.g., nitrates, sodium). Please visit Public Health Ontario for a list of licensed labs that can test your private well water for other parameters: [List of Licensed Laboratories | ontario.ca](#)

What are Total Coliform and *E.coli*?

- **Total coliforms** are a group of bacteria commonly found in animal waste, sewage, soil, and vegetation. They are also found in the intestines of animals and humans. Total coliforms are not likely to cause illness, but their presence indicates that your water supply may be vulnerable to contamination from the surrounding environment.
- ***E.coli* bacteria** are normally found only in human and animal digestive systems. The presence of these bacteria in your drinking water usually means that human

or animal waste is entering your well from a nearby source, such as a local septic system or from surface water that has found its way into the well. Although most strains of *E. coli* bacteria are harmless, the presence of *E. coli* in well water indicates fecal contamination, which may be accompanied by other harmful bacteria, viruses, or parasites.

How to Interpret Your Well Water Results:

- Ottawa Public Health is available to support homeowners in interpreting the meaning of their well water results. Residents can contact 613-580-6744 and ask to speak with a Public Health Inspector.
- **A total coliform count of less than or equal to 5 and *E. coli* 0** means there is no significant bacterial contamination found. You can continue to drink your water.
- **A total coliform count of greater than 5 and *E. coli* 0** means there is significant bacterial contamination found and your water may be unsafe to drink. In this case, it is advised to stop drinking your water and resample as soon as possible. If the resample is less than 5 total coliform, your water is safe to drink.
- It is common to receive a total coliform count (whether above or below 5) if the correct steps are not followed in the well water sampling procedure.
- **An *E. coli* count of 1 or more** means there is evidence of fecal contamination. Your water is unsafe to drink.

For more information on how to maintain your well, please visit: [Free Well Water Testing - Ottawa Public Health](#) or contact 613-580-6744 and ask to speak with a Public Health Inspector.