How to Test

You are responsible for keeping your well water safe and testing it as needed. MDH recommends you use an accredited laboratory to test your water. Contact a laboratory to get sample containers and instructions, or ask your county environmental or public health services if they provide well testing services. The laboratory you select will be able to answer questions about how to take samples, cost, and how long it will take to receive your results.

It is important to test the water that you use for drinking or preparing infant formula. This may be the faucet at your kitchen sink or it might be another dispenser on your refrigerator door, a treatment system with a separate tap near your sink, or a filtration pitcher.

Resources

Search for Accredited Laboratories
(www.health.state.mn.us/labsearch)

Water Quality/Well Testing
(www.health.state.mn.us/wellwater)

Well Owner's Handbook: A Consumer's Guide to Water Wells in Minnesota
(www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/wells/construction/handbook.pdf)

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Contact

Minnesota Department of Health
Well Management Section
625 North Robert Street
P.O. Box 64975
St. Paul, MN 55164-0975
651-201-4600 or 800-383-9808
health.wells@state.mn.us
www.health.state.mn.us

To obtain this information in a different format call 651-201-4600.

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Well Water and Your Baby

Test your well water before or during pregnancy

Most well water in Minnesota is safe, but some well water has contaminants in it that can make babies sick or harm their development. The only way to know if your water might be harmful to a new baby is to have your private well tested.

We take extra steps to protect babies in our homes by doing simple things like using safety latches on cabinets and doors, covering unused electrical outlets, and making sure smoke detectors are working properly. Testing your private well is another easy step to take in your home to make sure your baby has a healthy start!

Babies are at greater risk of harm from water contaminants

Babies drink more water for their size than older children and adults. Babies' developing brains and organs are more susceptible to injury and damage and their bodies are not very good at getting rid of harmful substances.

Baby's healthy start begins with testing for five contaminants

MDH recommends testing for the five contaminants listed below to give your baby a healthy start. Some of these contaminants can pass from mother to baby during pregnancy.

Most of these contaminants can be reduced through properly maintained home treatment systems.

mg/L=milligram per liter and is the same as 1 part per million
µg/L=microgram per liter and is the same as 1 part per billion

Contaminant	How often a well should be tested	Health impacts for baby	Water can be harmful if:
Coliform bacteria	At least once a year	Coliform bacteria can indicate that other infectious bacteria, viruses, or parasites may be in your water. These may cause diarrhea, vomiting, cramps, nausea, headaches, fever, and fatigue. Infants and children are more likely to get sick or die from infectious diseases.	Any level of coliform bacteria may be harmful.
Nitrate	Every 2 years	High levels of nitrate can affect how blood carries oxygen and can cause methemoglobinemia (also known as blue baby syndrome). Methemoglobinemia can cause skin to turn a blue color and can result in serious illness or death. Bottle-fed infants under six months old are at the highest risk of getting methemoglobinemia.	The level is above 10 mg/L. *(measured as nitrate-nitrogen)*
Lead	At least once	Lead can damage the brain, kidneys, and nervous system. Lead can also slow development or cause learning, behavior, and hearing problems for children. Babies, children under 6 years old, and pregnant women are at the highest health risks from lead.	Any level of lead is harmful.
Manganese	At least once	High levels of manganese can cause problems with memory, attention, and motor skills. It can also cause learning and behavior problems in infants and children.	The level is above 100 µg/L.
Arsenic	At least once	High levels of arsenic can contribute to reduced intelligence in children and increased risk of cancers in the bladder, lungs, and liver. Arsenic can also contribute to diabetes, heart disease, and skin problems.	Any level of arsenic may be harmful. MDH highly recommends treating water with arsenic above 10 µg/L or finding an alternate source of water.