

# Boil Water Advisory For Private Well Owners

## Private Wells

Private well owners are responsible for assessing the risk to their own well. Routine testing for bacteria is recommended at least once a year under worst-case conditions, such as following the spring snow melt or a heavy rain storm. A test for bacteria should also be done following any maintenance to the well and plumbing system.

In circumstances where a significant risk of contamination may be present (ex: the well has been overtopped by flood water, other nearby wells are contaminated, or there is a change in colour, clarity, odour or taste), boiling your water as a precaution is recommended until the risk has passed. The well should be tested after the risk has passed and water should not be consumed until test results confirm it is safe to drink.

## What to do when you're advised to boil your water

Individual private well owners may also be advised by a laboratory to boil their water if test results show bacteria are present in the well water. Boiling your drinking water will kill microorganisms (bacteria, viruses, protozoa) that could cause illness, and should apply even if you have a water treatment device in your house. These devices may not kill or remove microorganisms that are in your water supply.

In most cases, tap water used only for drinking or other consumptive purposes needs to be boiled. The water can still be used, without additional treatment, for bathing, showering, laundry and washing dishes. If the contamination is severe (E.coli results > 200/100mL), all water used for any domestic purpose should be boiled. (See Boil Water Advisory Fact Sheet #4 "Boil Water Advisory - For All Domestic Water Uses").

Anyone who has a weakened immune system (ex: cancer patient, someone taking immune suppressing medication, etc.) should contact their doctor or public health professionals for advice. Some of the additional precautions listed in Fact Sheet #4 "Boil Water Advisory For All Domestic Water Uses" may be recommended.

Boil Water Advisory Fact Sheet #4 - Boil Water Advisory For All Domestic Water Uses is available on the web at: [www.gov.mb.ca/sd/pubs/water/drinking\\_water/factsheet\\_boil\\_water\\_advisory4.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/sd/pubs/water/drinking_water/factsheet_boil_water_advisory4.pdf).

## Boil water advisory for drinking water only

Tap water should be brought to a rolling boil for one minute and then stored in clean containers. A container of boiled water may be stored in the refrigerator to keep it cold.

Once the water has been boiled, it is safe to use for:

- drinking
- making infant formula and juice
- cooking

- making ice
- washing fruits and vegetables
- brushing teeth and soaking false teeth
- feeding pets

Kettles with an automatic shut-off feature may not boil the water for one full minute.

When boiling water, care must be taken to avoid burns and scalding. Place kettles and pots on back burners and away from counter edges. If you are boiling water in a microwave, put a glass rod, wooden or plastic microwave-safe stick (never metal) in the container so you do not super heat the water.

Get rid of all ice, infant formula, juice, drink mixes, etc. that were made before you were advised to boil your water.

Use usual precautions for infants under 6 months, (ex: sterilize bottles in boiling water).

An alternative to boiling water is to use water from a known safe source (ex: bottled water).

You can use tap water for washing hands, dishes and laundry. Follow normal precautions when washing hands and dishes. Wash hands properly, rubbing all parts of the hand with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Dishes should be air dried and not wiped.

Adults and teens can shower or bath as long as they don't swallow any water. Older children can be given a shower with a hand-held showerhead, avoiding the face. Younger children should be sponge-bathed only, because they are most likely to swallow tub or shower water.

Please share this information with other people who use the tap water, especially those who may not have received notice directly (for example, renters, shared well owners, staff or clients).

## Fixing and re-testing your well

Manitoba has developed a series of Well Water Factsheets to help you find and fix problems with your privately owned well. Well Water Fact Sheet #1 "How to Reduce the Risk of Well Water Contamination" discusses proper well construction and maintenance. Well Water Factsheets #3 and #4 tell you how to properly disinfect a well - Factsheet #3 talks about the partial chlorination method, which can be done by the well owner; Factsheet #4 talks about the full chlorination method, which is normally done by a licenced plumber or well driller.

Once any maintenance issues have been addressed and the well has been properly disinfected, wait one week and test it again for bacteria. If your first bacteria test was completed under the provincial program for subsidized bacteria testing of private well, you should have received a free re-sample coupon with your test results. Follow the instructions on Well Water Fact Sheet #2 "How to Test Well Water for Bacteria", and any sampling instruction provided by the laboratory. Be sure to label your sample bottles correctly, fill out all the information needed on the sample submission (or chain of custody) form, and get your sample to the laboratory for testing within 30 hours of collection.

The Well Water Series of Factsheets are available on the web at:

[www.manitoba.ca/sd/water/drinking-water/well-videos/index.html](http://www.manitoba.ca/sd/water/drinking-water/well-videos/index.html)

**Well Water Fact Sheet #1** - How to Reduce the Risk of Well Water Contamination

**Well Water Fact Sheet #2** - How to Test Well Water For Bacteria

**Well Water Fact Sheet #3** - How to Disinfect a Well - Partial Chlorination Method

**Well Water Fact Sheet #4** - How to Disinfect a Well - Full Chlorination Method

**Well Water Factsheet #5** - Understanding Your Well Water Bacteria Results

## After testing shows water is safe to drink again

When your well water supply is safe again, you can use the tap water as usual, after completing the following steps:

- Flush out your household water pipes to ensure they contain safe water before using them.  
To do this:
  - Turn on one hot water tap and let it run until the water is cold. This will drain the hot water heater and refill it with safe water.
  - Then, turn on all your cold water taps, faucets, fountains, showerheads and outside hose spigots and let them run for five minutes.
- Remove and clean all screens on taps and faucets.
- Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle.
- Replace any water filter cartridges in water treatment devices and follow the maintenance instructions in the owner's manual.

**Note:** Private well owners should only use well water after a water test confirms it is safe to drink again.

## For more information

For more information on drinking water safety, water treatment devices or to receive a copy of other drinking water or well water fact sheets, please visit the Office of Drinking Water website at [www.manitoba.ca/drinkingwater](http://www.manitoba.ca/drinkingwater) or contact the Private Well, Education and Outreach Co-ordinator at 204-948-1351. To locate a local Office of Drinking Water near you, please refer to the website at [www.manitoba.ca/sd/pubs/water/drinking\\_water/odw\\_contact.pdf](http://www.manitoba.ca/sd/pubs/water/drinking_water/odw_contact.pdf).

For information on certification for water treatment devices, visit [www.nsf.org](http://www.nsf.org).

For information on well driller reports, well construction or sealing of unused wells, contact Manitoba Sustainable Development, Groundwater Management Section at 204-945-6959.

For health information, contact Health Links/Info Santé at 204-788- 8200 in Winnipeg; toll free at 1-888-315-9257 or contact your local public health office. To find your nearest office, go to: [www.manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html](http://www.manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html).