

Frequently Asked Questions

Home Water Testing

July 2014

The quality of your water impacts your health and the health of your family. As such, it is important to be well informed about the water you use in your home.

● Public Water Systems

If you pay a water bill, you are purchasing water from a regulated or public water system (PWS). This water system or PWS is required to monitor, test and report the results to the federal or state drinking water agencies responsible for making sure it meets the National Primary Drinking Water Standards. When there are contaminants in this water that can cause illness or other problems, your public water company is required to notify you.

Most people in Oklahoma receive water from a community water system that provides its customers with an annual water quality report, also known as a Consumer Confidence Report (CCR). Normally, you will receive it with your water bill once a year in July. The report contains information on contaminants found, possible health effects, and the water's source. If you do not receive a report, contact your water supplier.

● Private Water Supplies

If your drinking water does not come from a public water system, or you get your drinking water from a household well, you are on a private water supply. Therefore, you alone are responsible for assuring that it is safe and of adequate quality for your needs. The federal and state governments do not regulate privately owned wells in Oklahoma. For this reason, routine testing for a few of the most common contaminants is highly recommended. Even if you currently have a safe, pure water supply, regular testing can be valuable because it establishes a record of water quality. This record is helpful



for resolving any future problems or if you are considering selling or purchasing a property with a well as the water supply.

The following assessment will help determine when to test your private drinking water. Also refer to the Environmental Protection Agency's website, <http://water.epa.gov/drink/info/>, for additional guidance.

How frequently should I test?

Test water every year for total coliform bacteria, nitrate, conductivity and pH levels. It is especially important to have these tests performed if you have a new well or have replaced or repaired the: pipes, pressure tank, pump, or well casing. Also, if there is

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an abrupt or noticeable change in your water, you should have it tested.

Do you expect to have a new baby in the household?

It is preferable to test your water for coliform bacteria and nitrate in the early months of a pregnancy. It is imperative that tests be performed before bringing an infant home, especially if the infant will be fed formula or foods prepared with well water.

In addition to illness, a variety of less serious problems such as taste, color, odor and staining of clothes or plumbing fixtures are signs of possible water quality problems. Other things to consider include the proximity of your water well to septic systems and the composition of your home's plumbing materials (PVC and/or metal).

Do you have taste, odor and staining issues?

Test for sulfate, chloride, iron, manganese, hardness and corrosivity (pH, alkalinity) every three years. If you suspect other contaminants, test for those also.

Have you had a chemical leak or fuel spill near your water supply?

Test your well for chemical contaminants, such as volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Tests can be expensive, so consider limiting them to possible problems specific to your situation. To find out about possible impurities in your area, you may contact DEQ, an environmental consultant, or an accredited laboratory.

Are there unexplained illnesses or persons with compromised health in your family? Have you noticed a change in water taste, odor, color or clarity?

If so, you may need to test your water more than once a year.

Regardless of your water source, here are two situations that may require testing:

Do you suspect that some of your household plumbing materials and water service lines may contain lead?

Most public water systems test for lead as a regular part of water monitoring. These tests give a system-wide picture but do not reflect conditions at a specific household faucet. If you want to know if your home's drinking water contains unsafe levels of lead, have your water tested. This is the only way to confirm if lead is present or absent. Some faucet and pitcher filters can remove lead from drinking water. If you use a filter to remove lead, be sure you get one that is certified to remove lead by NSF International. For more information, visit <http://water.epa.gov/drink/info/lead/index.cfm>, or call the Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1-(800)426-4791.

Are you considering a home water treatment unit?

Find out what is in your water and what you might want to remove before contacting potential dealers. Different treatment types remove different pollutants or impurities and no one device does it all. Be informed so you can make the right decision. For guidance get the EPA pamphlet, "Home Water Treatment and Filtration" at 1-(800)426-4791 or visit: <http://water.epa.gov/drink/info/> and www.epa.gov/safewater/wot.

Who can test your water?

You can have your water tested by the DEQ State Environmental Laboratory. If you wish to use another lab, make certain it is certified to perform the tests you need. For this, you should contact the State Environmental Laboratory Services Lab Certification program at 1-(866)412-3057 or online at <http://www.deq.state.ok.us/CSDnew/labcert.htm>.

How do I collect samples?

Contact the lab where you will send your samples for instruction on how to sample and to determine if special sample containers are required. Some private labs may send a trained technician to collect the sample for an additional fee.



Additional Information

For additional information visit our webpage at <http://www.deq.state.ok.us/CSDnew/sel.htm>.

Contact Us

You can contact the DEQ State Environmental Laboratory Services at (866) 412-3057 or by e-mail at selsd@deq.ok.gov.

When to Test Your Well Water

Conditions or nearby activities	Recommended Tests
Recurrent gastro-intestinal illness	Coliform bacteria
Water with laxative effects	Sulfate, conductivity
Infant in the home	Coliform bacteria, nitrite-nitrate
Home daycare	Coliform bacteria, nitrite-nitrate (Contact OK Dept. of Human Services, Child Care Services, 1-844-834-8314 for testing requirements)
Household plumbing contains lead (built prior to 1988)	pH, lead, copper
Radon in indoor air or region is radon rich	Radon
Scaly residues, soaps do not lather, determining if water softener is working?	Hardness (before and/or after treatment)
Water softener needed to treat hardness	Manganese, iron
Colored deposits, stained plumbing fixtures or laundry, test for:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Green/blue - Copper• White - TDS, sulfate, calcium• Reddish brown/black - Iron, iron related bacteria, and manganese
Bitter/acrid taste or odor	Corrosivity (pH, alkalinity), metals
Rotten egg odor	Sulfate reducing bacteria
Pitting of pipes, plumbing, faucets	Corrosivity (pH, alkalinity), lead
Rapid wear of water treatment equipment	Corrosivity (pH, alkalinity), conductivity
Nearby areas of intensive agriculture	Nitrite-nitrate, pesticides, coliform bacteria, conductivity
Animal feedlots nearby	Nitrite-nitrate, conductivity, coliform bacteria
Coal or other mining operation nearby	Metals, pH, corrosivity
Gas or oil drilling operation nearby	Chloride, sulfate, sodium, barium, strontium, conductivity
Odor of gasoline, diesel or fuel oil and near gas station or buried fuel tanks	Total petroleum hydrocarbons (TPH)
Dump, junkyard, landfill, factory or dry-cleaning operation nearby	VOC, total dissolved solids (TDS), pH, sulfate, chloride, metals
Salty taste or a heavily salted roadway nearby	Chloride, conductivity, sodium
Do you live in Oklahoma, Logan, Canadian, Cleveland, or Pottawatomie county?	Uranium, chromium, arsenic, selenium