

HEALTH DISTRICT CONTACT INFORMATION

Panhandle Health District

208-415-5200

www.phd1.idaho.gov

(serving Benewah, Bonner, Boundary, Kootenai, and Shoshone counties)

North Central Health District

208-799-3100

www.idahopublichealth.com

(serving Clearwater, Idaho, Latah, Lewis, and Nez Perce counties)

Southwest District Health

208-455-5400

www.publichealthidaho.com

(serving Adams, Canyon, Gem, Owyhee, Payette, and Washington counties)

Central District Health

208-375-5211

www.cdhd.idaho.gov

(serving Ada, Boise, Elmore and Valley counties)

South Central Public Health District

208-737-5900

www.phd5.idaho.gov

(serving Blaine, Camas, Cassia, Gooding, Jerome, Lincoln, Minidoka, and Twin Falls counties)

Southeastern Idaho Public Health

208-233-9080

www.sdhdidaho.org

(serving Bannock, Bear Lake, Bingham, Butte, Caribou, Franklin, Oneida, and Power counties)

Eastern Idaho Public Health District

208-522-0310

www.phd7.idaho.gov

(serving Bonneville, Clark, Custer, Fremont, Jefferson, Lemhi, Madison, and Teton counties)

IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND WELFARE

Bureau of Community and

Environmental Health

1-866-240-3553

bceh@dhw.idaho.gov

Idaho Bureau of Laboratories

208-334-2235

statelab@dhw.idaho.gov

www.statelab.idaho.gov

NSF INTERNATIONAL

Consumer Hotline 1-800-673-8010

www.nsf.org

SUGGESTED TESTING SCHEDULE

The table below shows how often you should test your well for contaminants.

Contaminants	How often should I test?
Bacteria Nitrate	Once a year
Arsenic Uranium Fluoride	Once every 3 to 5 years

BACTERIA

IN YOUR

WELL WATER



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH & WELFARE

Private wells can provide a clean, safe source of water if they are properly located, built, and maintained. As a private well owner, it is your responsibility to make sure that your water is safe to use by testing for contaminants. This brochure provides information on bacteria and helps you understand the possible health effects of drinking water that has bacteria.

How Can Bacteria Get Into My Well?

Bacteria are microscopic organisms that are found almost everywhere. One type of bacteria, coliform bacteria, are commonly found in soil, surface water, on plants and in the intestines of humans and other warm-blooded animals. Coliform bacteria that are washed into the ground by rain are usually filtered out as the water passes through the soil into the groundwater. However, poorly-constructed or unsealed wells, fractured rock or cracked cisterns can provide a path for coliform bacteria to enter groundwater and private wells.

How Do I Know If My Well Has Bacteria?

Just because water is clear and smells okay does not mean the water is safe. Testing the water is the only way to know if there is a bacterial problem. Since it is not practical to test your well water for every type of bacteria, a lab test will look for coliform bacteria. If coliforms are found or present, then it is possible that harmful bacteria are in the well water. For information on how to test your well, contact your local public health district (numbers are located on the back of this brochure).

It is best to test for coliform bacteria in the spring during wet weather. This is when bacteria are most likely to be found because runoff and excess soil moisture can carry contaminants into shallow groundwater sources or through well defects.

Testing Frequency and When to Disinfect

Contaminant	When to Test	When to Disinfect Well
Bacteria	Once every year	After coliforms are found

What Are The Health Concerns?

Most coliform bacteria do not cause disease, but they can indicate that contamination has gotten into the water which means that harmful bacteria may be present. Some types of bacteria, such as *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) can cause nausea, vomiting, fever, and diarrhea. *E. coli* can be especially dangerous for children under the age of five years, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems.



What Can I Do If Bacteria Is In My Water?

If your test results show that coliform bacteria are present, the water should be boiled before drinking, and the well should be disinfected. You should boil your water at least one minute before using it for drinking or for the preparation of baby formula or other foods that will not be cooked. Your local public health district can provide you with information on how to disinfect your well. The source of the bacteria needs to be determined and the problem corrected.

Note: Boiling water will not remove other types of contaminants such as uranium, nitrates, arsenic, and fluoride.

What Can I Do To Maintain My Water System?

If you install a treatment device, make sure it is certified by NSF International and follow the manufacturer's suggested maintenance schedule to be sure your water is safe.

Also, your well should be maintained to keep it in good working order. To help keep track of well maintenance, it is recommended that you create and maintain a "system maintenance log." The log should include the location of the well, construction and contractor details, as well as results of any water tests. A copy of a log is available by calling the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare at 1-866-240-3553.

For questions about your well water, contact your local public health district.