

## HEALTH DISTRICT CONTACT INFORMATION

### Panhandle Health District

208-415-5200

[www.phd1.idaho.gov](http://www.phd1.idaho.gov)

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

### Public Health - North Central District

208-799-3100

[www.idahopublichealth.com](http://www.idahopublichealth.com)

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

### Southwest District Health

208-455-5400

[www.swdh.org](http://www.swdh.org)

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

### Central District Health Department

208-375-5211

[www.cdhd.idaho.gov](http://www.cdhd.idaho.gov)

(serving Ada, Boise, Elmore and Valley counties)

### South Central Public Health District

208-737-5900

[www.phd5.idaho.gov](http://www.phd5.idaho.gov)

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

### Southeastern Idaho Public Health

208-233-9080

[www.siphidaho.org](http://www.siphidaho.org)

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

### Eastern Idaho Public Health District

208-522-0310

[www.eiph.idaho.gov](http://www.eiph.idaho.gov)

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

## IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

### Licensed Well Drillers

[research.idwr.idaho.gov/apps/wellconstruction/](http://research.idwr.idaho.gov/apps/wellconstruction/)

[Licwelldrillers/](http://Licwelldrillers/)

### Ground Water Protection Section

Boise: 208-287-4800

[www.idwr.idaho.gov](http://www.idwr.idaho.gov)

**Northern Region, Coeur d'Alene:** 208-762-2800

**Eastern Region, Idaho Falls:** 208-525-7161

**Southern Region, Twin Falls:** 208-736-3033

**Western Region, Boise:** 208-334-2190

## IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Water Program

Boise Office 208-332-8597

[www.agri.state.id.us](http://www.agri.state.id.us)

## IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

### Bureau of Community and Environmental Health

1-800-445-8647

[environmentalhealth.dhw.idaho.gov](http://environmentalhealth.dhw.idaho.gov)

[bceh@dhw.idaho.gov](mailto:bceh@dhw.idaho.gov)

### Idaho Bureau of Laboratories

208-334-2235

[www.statelab.idaho.gov](http://www.statelab.idaho.gov)

[statelab@dhw.idaho.gov](mailto:statelab@dhw.idaho.gov)

## IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

208-373-0502

[www.deq.idaho.gov](http://www.deq.idaho.gov)

## NSF INTERNATIONAL

Consumer Hotline 1-800-673-8010

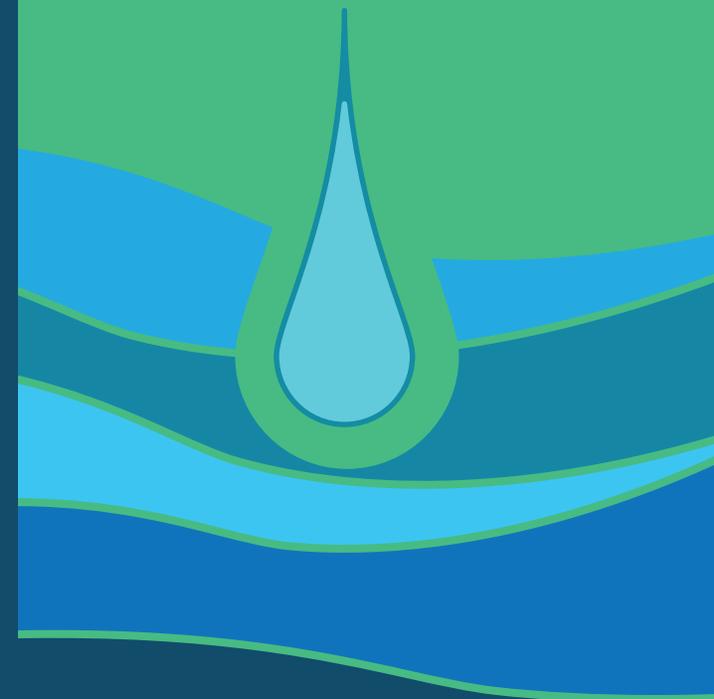
[www.nsf.org](http://www.nsf.org)

This publication was supported by the Grant or Cooperative Agreement Number, 1 NU61TS000286-01-00, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the Department of Health and Human Services.

March 2018

# BACTERIA IN YOUR WELL WATER

Tips to Protect Your Well Water



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE  
DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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.

## WHAT ARE BACTERIA?

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.

## WHAT ARE THE HEALTH CONCERNS?

Most coliform bacteria do not cause disease, but they can indicate that contamination has entered the water system, 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.

## 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*).

## WHAT CAN I DO IF BACTERIA IS IN MY WELL?

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 follows the manufacturer's suggested maintenance schedule to ensure 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 online at [environmentalhealth.dhw.idaho.gov](http://environmentalhealth.dhw.idaho.gov).

## TESTING FREQUENCY AND WHEN TO DISINFECT

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

*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.*