

Unprotected Springs Can Be Hazardous to Your Health

There's something romantic and mystical about springs and artesian wells, where water bubbles freely out of the ground without mechanical help. People travel miles to fill containers and drink this water instead of city water or their own well water. "It's healthier", some say, because it's from nature. When spring water is cool, refreshing and tastes good, many people believe it's better for them. And when it tastes bad, they may also believe it's better because it's full of 'healthy' minerals.

Unfortunately, taste is rarely a good indicator of quality. The fact is, unprotected springs and shallow, open, artesian (flowing) wells are often more subject to wide fluctuations in water quality and more susceptible to contamination than a properly constructed well.

Spring water is usually nothing more than groundwater from very shallow depths coming up to the ground surface. There are several types of springs. One common type is a bubbling spring, which may arise from a leak in an artesian aquifer. Another common type is a groundwater seep caused by the underground water table intercepting a hillside.

Drinking spring water is risky. The shallower the well, the less likely bacteria and other contaminants have been filtered out of the water by rock, sand, gravel or soil layers. Open springs also attract birds and other animals, which use the spring for drinking

or bathing. Giardiasis and tularemia are diseases you can get from drinking water contaminated by animals.

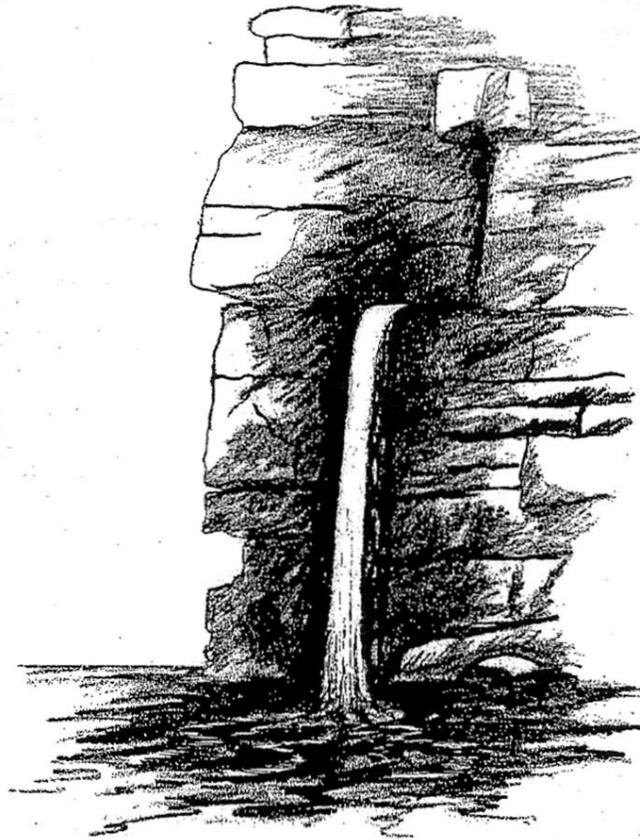
Springs are also questionable as a suitable water supply if their water flow varies throughout the year in proportion to rainfall and if they are influenced by such land uses as animal grazing, crop-growing and landfills. Springs may be entirely safe and acceptable human drinking water sources depending on where they are located, the source of

the spring water, the depth of the source water below the ground and how well the spring is protected from human or animal uses or agricultural practices. To meet state requirements, spring outlets must be protected by a concrete box built to meet strict Department of Natural Resources (DNR) standards.

You can get information and advice on using springs in your area as potential drinking water sources from the DNR, which regulates water supplies-including springs- to make sure water is safe for people to drink. Contact a private water supply specialist at a nearby DNR regional office. To find the private water supply

specialist for your area, call the WDNR Info Line at: 1-888-936-7463 (1-888-WDNRINfo). You can also go to dnr.wi.gov, search: wells. You will find the Private Water Supply specialists under "contact Information."

So, drink water from a spring only if you know the spring meets state standards. Water that looks and tastes good isn't necessarily good for you!



This document is intended solely as guidance and does not contain any mandatory requirements except where requirements found in statute or administrative rule are referenced. Any regulatory decisions made by the Department of Natural Resources in any matter addressed by this guidance will be made by applying the governing statutes and administrative rules to the relevant facts.

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PUB-DG-013 2019

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