

# Tests For Private Well Users

## Testing regularly is the only way to ensure well water is safe.

While private wells provide high-quality water, some contain substances that can affect our health. Testing is the only way to know what is in the water. Some tests should be completed routinely, while other tests depend on where the well is located and how the land around the well is used.

### Well users should complete these tests at least once a year:



**Bacteria** in a well can indicate risk for contamination by harmful organisms. Test for bacteria (total coliform and *E. coli*) once a year, but test **right away** if you notice a change in the water's taste, color or smell.



**Nitrate** is a naturally occurring chemical compound that can get into the environment in high levels due to human activities. High levels in drinking water can affect everyone's health. Test for nitrate once a year **and** before someone who is or may become pregnant uses the water or the water is given to a baby.

### Well users should complete these tests every five years:



**Arsenic** is a naturally occurring element. At high levels, arsenic can affect health. Most well users should test for arsenic once every five years.

Well users who live in Outagamie, Winnebago or Brown counties or had arsenic in a previous sample should test **every year**.



**Lead** is found in some plumbing materials, and there is no safe level of lead exposure. Test for lead once every five years **and** before a pregnant person uses the water or it is given to a baby.

### A note on private well owner responsibilities:

- Private well owners are responsible for testing and maintaining their wells.
- They are not required to regularly test or correct water quality issues.
- It is their choice to decide which tests to do and actions to take.



Wisconsin Department of Health Services  
Division of Public Health  
Groundwater and Drinking Water Program

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
Environmental Management Division  
Drinking Water and Groundwater Program



## Well users may want additional testing depending on where they live and how the land around the well is used.

This testing can look for naturally occurring and human-caused substances. Naturally occurring substances can get into well water from rocks and soil, while human-caused substances can get into well water from land use, plumbing materials or other sources.

### Common naturally occurring substances include:



**Fluoride** is a mineral that prevents tooth decay, but high levels can impact our health. Test for fluoride at least once.



**Manganese** is part of a healthy diet but can affect our health at high levels. Test for manganese if your water is brown or rust-black in color, stains your faucets, sinks or laundry, or has an off-taste or odor.



**Strontium** can affect how bones develop and how calcium works in the body. Test for strontium if you live in the eastern part of the state.

### When testing, it is best to use a Wisconsin-certified lab.

- ◆ Certified labs may include your local health department, a University of Wisconsin lab or a commercial lab.
- ◆ When selecting a lab, consider what substances you would like to test for, the cost of the testing and the sampling logistics.

### Common human-caused substances include:



**Atrazine** is a chemical used to kill weeds in crops. High levels can affect our health. Test for atrazine if you live near areas where pesticides are used, made or stored.



**PFAS** or perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances are a group of chemicals with many uses. Some can affect our health at low levels. Consider testing for PFAS if you live near a [known PFAS site](#).



**VOCs** or volatile organic compounds are a group of chemicals with many uses. Some VOCs can affect our health. Test for VOCs if you live near a landfill, gas station or dry cleaner.

### Learn more:

Find the link in this document at [dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Wells/homeowners.html](https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Wells/homeowners.html)



### Questions?

Contact us:

Private wells [DNRWELLREPORT@wi.gov](mailto:DNRWELLREPORT@wi.gov)

Health: [DHSEnvHealth@wi.gov](mailto:DHSEnvHealth@wi.gov)