



Have You Heard?

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MAY IS A GOOD TIME TO TEST DRINKING WATER

National Drinking Water Week was the first part of May while farmers were busy planting. It is to remind us and to bring attention to important water quantity and quality issues and their relationship to drinking water supplies, especially rural areas. Towns have water managers that keep a close handle on the water supply and water quality and submit samples routinely. In rural areas, the water manager becomes you if you live on a farm or acreage.

May is a good time to have your drinking water quality tested. May in Nebraska means warming soil temperatures, rain storms (we hope), greening grass and more outside activity. Warming soil temperatures also signal one of the most opportune times to get the best idea of your drinking water quality.

Private water supplies should be tested for total coliform bacteria and nitrates each year. Both substances can result in serious health complications. The only acceptable level of total coliform bacteria in your drinking water is no (zero) total coliform bacteria. The maximum contaminant level (MCL) for nitrate is 10 milligrams per liter (mg/L) — which is sometimes stated as parts per million (ppm). As nitrate levels approach or pass that MCL, well owners should consider treatment options.

As a private well owner you should also test your drinking water if:

Your well has been inundated with storm water or other runoff;

You have noticed any significant changes such as color, odor, taste or staining of household fixtures or linens;

Cracks in the well casing or well cap, or other issues with your well itself have been observed, land use around the well has changed, or a significant spill of chemicals within the area and local officials and neighbors are talking about it.

Water quality tests should only be done by the Department of Health and Human Services State Public Health Environmental Lab or labs that have been certified by the Department of Health and Human Services. Our office has test bottles for bacteria and nitrates that go to a certified lab. Check with our office or your local Extension Office closest to you.

Information on obtaining sample kits as well as a list of certified labs can be found at: http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Pages/lab_index.aspx. Local Natural Resources Districts also often assist with drinking water tests especially with nitrate tests. Your water well professional can also assist you with the sample as well as periodic inspection of your well components.

Take time to walk around your wellhead and make sure that nothing on the wellhead is damaged or potential contaminant sources are too close to your wellhead. Familiarize yourself with the wealth of information on the Nebraska Extension water website at: water.unl.edu.

Quite often our water is high in minerals or iron or manganese. At certain levels iron and manganese can cause various nuisances. We have some excellent third party information on how to deal with iron and manganese issues at: <http://extensionpublications.unl.edu/assets/pdf/g1714.pdf>

Knowledge of your drinking water and the critical water resources across our state is essential to help protect your health and the quality and quantity of water available for people, agriculture, wildlife and the environment.

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