

Drinking Water Tests for Private Wells

While many private wells provide quality water that is safe for you, your family, and pets, you should regularly test your well because it may have one or more water-quality problems. Some contaminants can be seen or tasted while others require testing to detect.

There are a few essential tests that should be performed routinely on every private well. Homeowners should routinely test their well. You may decide to test more often if your previous results were unsafe.

Three Routine Tests for Every Well Owner

Everyone is potentially at risk from the three most common contaminants in Wisconsin well water.

1. Bacteria

Every well should be tested once a year, and when you notice a change in taste, color, or smell.

2. Nitrate

Every well should be tested once a year, and before the well will be used by a woman who is or may become pregnant.

3. Arsenic

Every well should be tested once. If arsenic was present in previous tests, you should test once a year.



Well Owners Responsibilities

Private well owners are responsible for testing and maintaining their well. Unlike public water systems, private well owners are not required to regularly test their wells or correct water-quality problems. It is your choice to decide which test to do and actions to take.

Certified Labs

Find a list of certified labs across the state by:

- Going to dnr.wi.gov and searching “Accredited Laboratories” or
- Contacting your local health department.

Flip over for additional tests

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.



This document was created by the Wisconsin Groundwater Coordinating Council (GCC). For more information on the GCC, visit: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Groundwater/GCC/about.html>

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Additional Testing for Private Well Owners

You may consider additional testing to look for:

- Naturally occurring contaminants in the rock and soil that may enter your well.
- Human caused contaminants from land-use, your plumbing materials, or other sources of pollution near your well.

Natural



Manganese [↗](#)

If you notice brown or black staining in your home or black sediment in your water, test once for manganese.



Strontium [↗](#)

Consider testing for strontium if you live in the eastern or northern part of the state. Test twice over a two-year period in two different seasons, fall and spring being best.



Fluoride [↗](#)

Test for fluoride when you have a baby or when you move into a home with a well. Your dentist and pediatrician will use this information to decide how much additional fluoride to recommend.

Human



Pesticides [↗](#)

Consider this test if your home is within ¼ mile of agricultural fields or areas where pesticides are manufactured, stored, or mixed.



Lead and Copper [↗](#)

Test once every five years or if the water will be used by a pregnant woman or baby. Lead and copper may be in your water from the plumbing materials used in your home.



VOCs [↗](#)

Volatile organic compounds (VOCs), testing is recommended for homes within ¼ mile of a landfill, industrial site, gas station or other underground tank, and especially if you smell chemical or fuel odors in the home.

Useful Links

Health information:

dhs.wisconsin.gov/water/drinking.htm

Identify water symptoms:

dnr.wi.gov/topic/DrinkingWater/IdentifySymptoms.html

Private well data:

uwsp.edu/cnr-ap/watershed/Pages/WellWaterViewer.aspx

Agricultural chemicals in groundwater:

datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/SurfaceGroundwaterMonitoring.aspx

Download this factsheet:

dnr.wi.gov/files/PDF/pubs/DG/DG0023.pdf

For more information on these tests go to dnr.wi.gov and search “Water Contaminants” or call 608-266-1054