

Should I Get my Drinking Water Tested Handout?

If you get your drinking water from a private well, spring, or domestic water license, you should get your water tested to see if it is safe to drink and suitable for use in your home. The parameters listed below represent a general test for drinking water quality for most healthy persons. People with medical conditions should consult their physician about parameters important to their specific health concern. Certified Well Drillers, neighbours, and Public Health Inspectors might know parameters of local interest. To protect yourself from fecal contamination, drinking water from surface water, springs, and shallow wells must be disinfected. The Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality produced by Health Canada list the recommended levels for these parameters.

Parameters

E. coli group

Total Coliform

The e.coli and total coliform tests look for fecal contamination in the water that can make you sick.

Turbidity

A test for Turbidity looks for cloudiness in drinking water caused by suspended particles. Bacteria, viruses and parasites can attach themselves to these particles. Health risks increase as turbidity rises.

Metals and Chemicals

Antimony
Arsenic
Cadmium
Fluoride
Nitrates

Barium
Chromium
Lead
Selenium

Boron
Cyanide
Mercury
Uranium

These tests look for metals and chemicals that can cause illness at low concentrations.

Alkalinity
Conductance
Magnesium
Sulphate

Calcium
Copper
Manganese
Total Dissolved Solids

Chlorides
Hardness
pH
Zinc

Colour
Iron
Sodium

These tests are for items that can affect consumer acceptance and suitability for household uses like bathing, washing, and laundry. At elevated concentrations, these parameters can become health concerns. Infants and persons with medical conditions or special diets should consult their physician as they may benefit from lower concentrations than are recommended by the Canadian Drinking Water Guidelines.

Laboratories

The laboratory you choose should be accredited by the Canadian Association for Environmental Analytical Laboratories. Contact these labs for information on testing parameters such as sulphide, if you notice a “rotten egg” odour, or petroleum products, herbicides and pesticides. The laboratories will provide information on pricing, sample bottles and how to take samples. They might also provide an interpretation of the results.

1. CAEAL – Canadian Association for Environmental Analytical Laboratories Chemical Analysis – <http://www.caeal.ca/>
2. List of laboratories approved by the Provincial Health Officer Bacteriological Analysis – http://www.pathology.ubc.ca/education/Certificate_Programs/Enhanced_Water_Quality_Assurance/PHO_-_Approved_Laboratory_List.htm

References

1. For more information contact your local Health Protection office or see our Drinking Water website at: <http://www.interiorhealth.ca/Health+and+Safety/Drinking+Water/>
2. Health Canada Drinking Water Site http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/water-eau/drink-potab/index_e.html
3. Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality-Summary Table http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/water-eau/doc_sup-appui/sum_guide-res_recom/index_e.html