

Water Safety after an Emergency

Is my water safe to drink?

During emergency events, water supplies can become contaminated. The safety of your water is largely dependent on where it comes from.

Public Water Supply Systems

If your water comes from a water supplier, you should check with them to see if your water is safe to drink. All water suppliers in BC are required to test their water regularly to ensure it is safe. Public systems include small/private (e.g. restaurants or trailer parks), cooperatively-owned (e.g. strata properties), and larger municipal systems owned by local governments. If there is a health risk associated with the water supply system, the system owner or operator will issue a public notification, such as a **Water Quality Advisory** or **Boil Water Notice** and provide direction on how to treat the water before drinking.

Private Surface Water

If your drinking water comes from a spring, stream, creek, pond, river or lake, it should be considered contaminated and should be boiled or otherwise disinfected prior to consumption. This is true all of the time, not just in response to a flood or other natural disaster.

Private Wells

If your drinking water comes from a private well, have your water tested by a lab to know whether or not it is safe. Even if you are not feeling sick, your water may be unsafe. Some contaminants found in well water cannot be seen, tasted or smelled, but can cause illness leading to vomiting and diarrhea.

Well water quality is affected by surface and underground geology, the depth and construction of the well, and other factors. Water quality can change seasonally in response to heavy rain or drought. It is important to protect and maintain your well to prevent contamination, and to test your well water. A realistic approach would be to sample your well water twice a year and/or after it has been impacted by an emergency event.

For more information on sampling your well, visit <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/well-water-testing>.