

Good Water Habits

What You Need to Know

More than one billion glasses of water a day are consumed by Americans. But do you know where the water you drink comes from? Do you know that it is safe? Whether you use well water or a public drinking water supply, you can take measures to make sure your water is safe. What follows are answers to some common questions concerning safe water issues.

What harmful items get into water?

Bacteria and viruses that cause diseases, nitrates, lead, copper, and harmful chemicals are just a few things that can find their way into drinking water.

Germ from bacteria and viruses can cause upset stomachs, diarrhea, or more serious illnesses. Nitrates are absorbed into water from fertilizers and the waste of animals and humans. Studies have shown they can lead to birth defects and miscarriages. Lead and copper get into water from pipes. Too much lead can cause learning and behavioral problems in children. Pesticides, gas, and oil are among other chemicals that can seep into water and cause health problems.

How do I make sure lead and copper pipes aren't affecting water?

You can take two precautions that will help tremendously if you have public water. When you haven't used the water in a while—like in the morning or when you come home from work—the pipes need cleared out. Let cold water run until you feel the temperature change. Also, never use hot water from the tap before cooking, drinking, or making baby formula. Use cold water and warm it on a stove.

The pipes are easy to spot in your house. Copper pipes are reddish-brown, while lead pipes are a dull gray.

How do I know what type of well I have?

If you have a private water source, you must know your well. Below are basic types of wells:

- Dug and bored wells usually have a large hole, two feet across or more. They are usually less than 50 feet deep.
- Drilled wells usually have a narrow hole, four to 10 inches, and are much deeper. At times, they are hundreds of feet deep.
- A driven-point well is usually one to two inches around. They may not be deep.

Is the age of the well important?

Age is definitely important. You should have your well water tested every year, but if the well is more than 20 years old, you need to have the well itself checked out too.

Are there are other things to look for in keeping up my well?

Yes. Local rules may dictate some details, so it is always best to check with your health department for the exact laws.

However, some standards are as follows:

- The well casing needs to stick above the ground up to 12 inches. However, this height could vary due to local rules.
- There should be no gaps between the casing and the material or dirt around it.
- The casing should not have any holes or cracks.
- Make sure the well cap fits tightly.
- A screen should cover any openings or vents.
- Make sure there is not a low area near the well where rainwater could collect. Rainwater carries pollutants that can seep into a well.
- Don't keep gas, oil, or fertilizers near the well.

Is there anyone I can contact if contamination is discovered or I have more questions?

Yes, you can always call your local water company, your well contractor, or your health department. For more information about your private well, you can visit the website for well owners at www.wellowner.org or the National Ground Water Association's site at www.ngwa.org. Your best source of information is always a licensed, qualified groundwater contractor. You can find one near you at the wellowner.org site or by contacting the National Ground Water Association at (800) 551.7379. Perhaps the most important natural phenomenon on Earth, the hydrologic cycle describes the constant movement and endless recycling of water between the atmosphere, the land surface, and under the ground. The hydrologic cycle supplies the force needed for most natural processes, thus supporting life itself.

Where can I get more information?

For more information on your private water well, contact your local contractor. Also, visit the website of the National Ground Water Association, www.ngwa.org, and its site just for well owners, www.wellowner.org.



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