

How To Test Your Drinking Water

Every resident in Portage County relies on groundwater for their source of drinking water. Approximately 40% of Portage County residents rely on a private well for their own water use.

Municipalities are required to test their water supplies regularly to ensure that the water is safe to drink. **However, there are no such requirements for private wells.**



Most private wells provide a clean, safe supply of water; however, contaminants can pollute private wells, and unfortunately you cannot see, smell or taste most of them. Consequently, private well owners should test their water on a regular basis. The decision on what to test your well water for should be based on the types of land uses near your well. Common private well contaminants can be found below and in the brochure “Tests for Drinking Water from Private Wells”.

Contaminant	Which wells should be tested?	How often should I test?
Coliform Bacteria	Every well	Annually
Nitrate	Every well	Annually
Pesticides	Wells within ¼ mile of Agricultural fields	Test once every 5-10 years
Lead	Homes with copper plumbing installed before 1985 or brass fixtures and naturally soft-water	Considered a one time test
Copper	Homes most at risk have new copper plumbing or naturally-soft water	Considered a one time test
VOC's	Wells within ¼ mile of a land fill, underground fuel or gasoline tank	Test once every 5-10 years
Arsenic	Every well	Test once and annually if detected
Radon	Homes with high radon levels that are not reduced through ventilation	Test once if needed

A private well owner should use a certified laboratory to test their drinking water for possible contaminants. A list of drinking water accredited laboratories can be found online at <https://dnr.wi.gov/regulations/labcert/labLists.html>. Different laboratories may be certified to test for different contaminants. Always make sure that the lab you choose is certified in the test you want. The procedures used for collection will vary depending on the type of test being done. For reliable results follow the sampling instructions given by the lab.

For more information on water testing you can visit the DNR Private Well Testing page at <https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Wells/privateWellTest.html> or you can Contact the Portage County Water Resource Specialist, Jen McNelly at 715-346-1334 or mcnellyj@co.portage.wi.us

