

**Test Your
Well Water
for Bacteria
Every Year.**

**Jefferson County
Environmental Public Health**

615 Sheridan St
Port Townsend, WA 98368
Phone: 360-385-9444
Fax: 360-379-4487
[http://www.co.jefferson.wa.us/204/
Environmental-Health](http://www.co.jefferson.wa.us/204/Environmental-Health)

DROP OFF FOR PICKUP

Wednesdays Only
9am-11am

Jefferson County Environmental Public
Health

617 Sheridan St
Port Townsend WA 98368
(360) 385-9444

Monday—Friday
8am-4:30pm
Spectra Labs

26276 Twelve Tree Lane, Suite C
Poulsbo, WA 98370
(360) 779-5141

Or another accredited drinking water lab

PUBLIC HEALTH
ALWAYS WORKING FOR A SAFER AND
HEALTHIER COMMUNITY

**Testing Your
Drinking Water
for Bacteria**



What is Coliform?

Coliform bacteria are organisms that are present in the environment and in the feces of all warm blooded animals including humans. Most coliform bacteria are harmless. Because coliform bacteria are so common, they are used to indicate whether bacteria are present in your water supply. If coliform bacteria are in your drinking water, then there is a chance that more harmful bacteria have also made their way into your drinking water supply.

Any time your water tests positive for coliform, the lab will automatically test it for the presence of *E. coli* bacteria. The presence of *E. coli* bacteria means that your water supply is being contaminated by fecal material. If your water tests positive for *E. coli*, we recommend that you boil your water or drink bottled water while re-testing your water. Many people get false-positive test results for coliform since it is easy to accidentally contaminate the sample, so a second test is needed to confirm the results. If the second test comes back positive as well, you will need to disinfect your water supply and prevent further contamination.

Why Sample Your Water for Bacteria?

Water systems are subject to a certain amount of “wear and tear” over their lifetime that can make it possible for bacteria to enter. Bacteria can find their way into your water supply through tiny gaps and cracks in your water lines, pressure tanks, holding tanks, well casing, or well cap. The only way to tell if you have bacteria in your water supply is to have a water sample tested.

This is especially important if young children, elderly people, or individuals with weak or suppressed immune systems drink from your water supply. Even though most bacteria will not make you ill, any coliform bacteria present in your water sample could indicate a possibility that harmful bacteria could be present.

When Should You Sample?

You should test your well water at least once a year for the presence of bacteria. You should also test your water if you have experienced loss of water pressure or broken pipes, if you have performed maintenance on the well or equipment, or if there has been an earthquake in your area. If you have recently chlorinated your system, wait at least a week before testing for bacteria.

Where is the BEST Place to Sample?

The best sample point is a **metal** outside hose bib at least one foot above the ground. Make sure that the hose and any screens have been removed from the hose bib and that the faucet is not a “frost-free” type. The next best place to sample is from a **non-swivel** inside faucet. Because most kitchen faucets swivel, this usually means using the bathroom faucet. You will first need to **remove the aerator screen and washer from the faucet.**

For either type, the next step is to sterilize the faucet opening. If the faucet is metal, you can sterilize it with the flame from a cigarette lighter or a propane torch for one minute. If you are concerned about discoloring your faucet, or if

the faucet is plastic, use a ten-percent bleach solution. Bathe the faucet opening with the bleach solution for one full minute. Try not to touch the faucet after you have sterilized it.

How to Collect the Sample?

After selecting and sterilizing a faucet, run **cold** water through the faucet for a full five minutes. Be careful not to let water splash back onto the faucet from the ground, house, or sink. You only need a clear, steady, consistent flow of water – not a white, sporadic, or explosive gusher. (While you are waiting, this is a good time to fill out the paperwork attached to the bottle.) Once you have flushed the faucet for five minutes, turn the flow rate down until the stream is about as thick as a pencil.

The sample bottle has a small amount of white powder inside. This powder is an important part of the test, so **do not rinse out the bottle.** Remove the seal from the bottle and open the lid. Keep the lid in that hand and do not set it down. It is very important that you do not contaminate the bottle by putting the lid down, or by touching the inside of the lid or the threads of the bottle.

While holding the bottle in your other hand, fill the bottle to a point just above the 100ml. line. Screw the lid back on securely, dry off the outside of the bottle, and re-wrap the paperwork around the bottle. Keep the sample cool and bring it to a drop off point listed on the back (or another accredited drinking water lab) within twenty-four (24) hours.

