Tacoma | Pierce County Health Department
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HOW TO TEST YOUR WELL FOR BACTERIA OR NITRATE

"Coliform bacteria" is a general term used to describe a group of bacteria. Certain types of coliform bacteria, such as E.coli, are capable of causing illness in humans. The Health Department recommends that you test for coliform bacteria at least once a year and nitrate once every three years.

Contact a certified lab for a water sampling kit which typically consists of:

- A sample bottle
- A lab form
- A rubber band

Sample Collection

Step One
Choose a sample tap that best represents the water in your distribution system. Avoid poor sample sites such as swivel faucets, hot and cold mixing faucets (with a single lever), leaky or spraying faucets, drinking fountains, janitorial sinks, frost-free hose bibs, and faucets below or near ground level.

Step Two
Remove any attachments from the faucet, including aerators, screens, washers, hoses and water filters. The TPCHD recommends disinfecting the faucet by spraying it with a chlorine water solution. The solution should be 50% chlorine and 50% water.

Step Three
Turn on the cold water only and let it run in a steady stream for at least five minutes. Before collecting the sample, turn the water down to a thin stream (about the width of a pencil), then let the water run one minute.

Step Four
There may be some liquid or powder in the sample bottle to neutralize any chlorine that may be present. **Do Not** rinse it out.

Step Five
To avoid contamination while taking the sample, hold the bottle near the bottom with one hand, hold the top of the cap with the other, and then unscrew the cap. **Do not** set the cap face down, touch any part of the cap that touches the bottle, or let anything touch the rim or inside of the cap.

Step Six
Hold the bottle under the stream of water, being careful not to let the bottle touch the sample tap. Fill the bottle to the neck or indicated fill line, but do not allow it to overflow. Remove the bottle from the water flow and replace the cap.

Step Seven
Complete the lab slip. If there was anything unusual about the sample collection, note it on the lab slip. Laboratory forms vary, but the following information is very important to complete:

- Collection date and time the sample was taken
- Sample location (street address or other type of location identifier)
- Type of sample
- If treated, check type of treatment.

Step Eight
Secure the lab slip to the bottle with the rubber band. Deliver the sample to a certified lab or to a designated drop-off location for the lab as soon as possible. Lab analysis must begin within 30 hours of sample collection.

For more information contact the Health Department Water Resources Program at 253-798-6470.