

## What You Need to Know

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### What are coliform?

Coliforms are bacteria that are naturally present in the environment and used as an indicator that other, potentially harmful bacteria may be present.

Coliform are generally considered harmless bacteria. However, some specific types of coliform are harmful and may cause disease. Coliform bacteria have their origin in the intestinal tract of humans and all other warm-blooded animals and are found in sewage.

### Is it important to test well water for coliform?

Coliform bacteria are widespread in our environment. Through testing, coliform are easy to find and identify. When found in drinking water, coliform bacteria alert us to the potential of contamination and finding other harmful organisms. If the presence of coliform bacteria is observed by the laboratory, the sample will be tested for E. coli bacteria. E. coli is a coliform bacteria that when present indicates that water may be contaminated by human or animal waste.

### How does coliform bacteria affect health?

Exposure to some coliforms, such as E. coli, can cause short-term effects such as diarrhea, cramps, nausea, headaches, and other symptoms. They may pose a special health risk for infants, young children, and people with compromised immune systems.

### What should I do if coliform bacteria is found in my well water?

The standard for coliform in drinking water is 0; however, because coliform bacteria are very common, incidental contamination may occur. Until the problem is fixed or verified as no coliform present, use another source of water (such as bottled water) for drinking, cooking, preparing baby formula or food, washing produce, brushing your teeth, or any other use where you may swallow the water. If you are unable to use another source of water, you can bring your water to a full rolling boil (a boil that does not stop bubbling when stirred) for one minute to kill the coliform bacteria and E. coli. You can cool, save, and use the water for drinking and cooking once boiled. Resampling is always recommended before any physical intervention with the water supply system is attempted. If a second sample also finds coliform bacteria, a licensed professional well contractor should be contacted. The water supply system can be evaluated and repaired, and the well and distribution system can be sanitized.

The Oakland County Health Division recommends you sample your well annually for coliform bacteria. For more information about your well, contact the Oakland County Health Division Environmental Health Services at 248-858-1312.

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