



LA CROSSE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

February 15, 2019

Health Department Encourages Private Well Owners to Test Their Wells

Spring is just around the corner! Which means it is a great time to test your well. The La Crosse County Health Department encourages private well owners to test their wells annually. Even though your water may look, taste and smell good, it can still contain harmful bacteria and the only way to know is by getting it tested.

The Health Department will be at the Town of Holland, located at: W7937 County Rd. MH, Holmen, WI on the following days:

- **April 2nd** to *Collect* water test and provide information from 4:00 PM- 8:00 PM.
- **April 10th** to *Collect* water test and provide information from 3:00 PM- 6:00 PM.

Water bottles are available at the Town Hall if you would like to pick up ahead of time.

We apologize if you have received this and do not have a private well. You may disregard this letter.

There have been wells in La Crosse and other neighboring counties identified with high arsenic and nitrate levels. The federal drinking water standard used for identifying unsafe arsenic levels is 10 parts per billion (ppb) or above and the standard used for identifying unsafe nitrate levels is 10 parts per million (ppm) or above. We would like to find out if this is a widespread problem or if it is isolated to certain areas.

Arsenic is a naturally occurring element found in soil and bedrock throughout Wisconsin. Under certain conditions, arsenic can be released into groundwater and then enter wells. Long-term exposure to arsenic in drinking water is known to:

- Increase risk of skin, bladder, lung, liver, colon, and kidney cancer
- Damage blood vessels and nerves
- Increase blood pressure
- Cause Anemia
- Upset stomach
- Increase the risk of diabetes

Nitrate is naturally found in vegetables, plants, and fertilizers. Nitrate can enter groundwater due to manure and fertilizer runoff as well as septic system issues. Nitrate exposure has been known to:

- Decrease oxygen levels in blood. In infants this can result in the skin becoming a pale blue or lavender color, also known as “blue-baby syndrome”
- Increase the risk of certain cancers

- Increase the risk of birth defects

You can test your well for arsenic and nitrate at any certified laboratory. The La Crosse County Health Department (LCHD) has a certified laboratory and can test for arsenic at a reduced cost of \$29, bacteria for \$27, and nitrate for \$27.

Why should I test my well?

Contaminants such as bacteria, nitrate, arsenic and other metals can be found in private wells. Unlike municipal water systems, there is no law requiring the testing of private wells, except when it is first drilled or when the well casing is opened for pump repair. Homeowners are responsible for making sure their well water is safe to drink.

What should I test my well for and how often?

Test for bacteria and nitrate annually. Nitrate should be tested for especially if there are children consuming the water and/or pregnant and nursing mothers. Test for metals (full metals panel, including arsenic) if you never tested your well previously. Every well should be tested at least once for arsenic. If arsenic is present at any amount, retest annually thereafter.

If your water tests positive for contaminants, there are reliable options to address it!

Where can I find additional information and resources about private well testing?

La Crosse County Health Department website: <http://www.co.la-crosse.wi.us/health/home.asp>
608-785-9872
300 4th St N, La Crosse, WI 54601

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) awarded a grant to the La Crosse County Health Department to address human exposure to contaminants in drinking water. The grant will focus on private wells and small water systems in rural areas.

La Crosse County Health Department partners with Buffalo, Jackson, Monroe, Trempealeau, and Vernon County Health Departments to identify the extent of arsenic, lead, nitrate, and bacterial contamination in private wells. Rural residents will have the opportunity to test their water sources for contamination and reduce their exposure to health hazards by participating in this CDC-funded project.

Visit the CDC Safe Water Program site to learn more: <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/activities/water.html>
Additional information can also be found:

- WI Department of Natural Resources (DNR) website: <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wells/>
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) website: <https://www.epa.gov/privatewells>
- University of WI Stevens Point website:
<https://www.uwsp.edu/cnrap/watershed/Pages/default.aspx>
- Water Systems Council (WSC) Hotline: 1-888-395-1033 Website: www.watersystemscouncil.org

If you are interested in testing your well, you may pick up water bottles from the Health Department

Sample Bottle Pick Up: Mon-Fri 8:00AM-4:30PM
Sample Drop Off: Mon-Thurs 8:00AM-4:00PM