

Safe Drinking Water - Before and After a Flood

Floodwaters are contaminated with bacteria that may be harmful to human health. During times of flooding or high water, both drilled and dug wells are at risk of becoming contaminated with harmful bacteria. Wells may also become contaminated with sewage runoff from a flooded septic system.

If your well is surrounded or covered with floodwater, it is at risk of contamination and drinking water from the well water should be considered unsafe for human consumption, until the water can be tested to ensure it is free of harmful bacteria.

If you rely on drinking water from a private well that has been flooded, you may wish to use an alternate source of potable water (i.e. bottled water) for drinking, making infant formula, cooking, brushing teeth, washing produce and any other activities that involve directly consuming the water. Water from a flooded well can be made safe to consume by:

- rapidly boiling the water for at least one (1) minute, or
- adding 2 drops of 5-6% household bleach per litre of water, stirring the mixture and allowing it to sit for thirty minutes.

Once flood conditions have ceased and the floodwaters have receded, you will need to sample your well water to ensure it is free of harmful bacteria before it is safe to use. Water sample bottles can be obtained from the Health Unit, your local municipal office or the Provincial Public Health Laboratory. Water samples are tested for bacteria free of charge by the Provincial Laboratory. For more information on taking a water sample, refer to our "How Well is Your Well?" brochure.

If your well is contaminated, it will need to be disinfected. Household bleach can be used to disinfect a well. For more information on well water disinfection, refer to our *"How Well is Your Well?"* brochure.

If your drinking water supply is from a cistern, the water may be contaminated if the cistern was flooded. The same precautions should be taken for drinking water from a cistern during and after a flood, as for private wells.

If your drinking water supply is from a municipal source, listen to and follow any public announcements regarding the water supply. Local authorities and the Health Unit will tell you whether or not your municipal tap water is safe to use. If it is not safe, ensure to follow instructions provided by authorities whether it is to boil the water or to use an alternate source.

For more information and guidance regarding safe drinking water, visit the Health Unit's website at www.pcchu.ca or call Inspection Services at 705-743-1000 to speak with a Public Health Inspector.