

# Is Your Water Safe To Drink?

**Many Contaminants are tasteless, colorless, and odorless. So, how do you know?**

The two contaminants that make you “sickest the quickest” are bacteria and nitrates



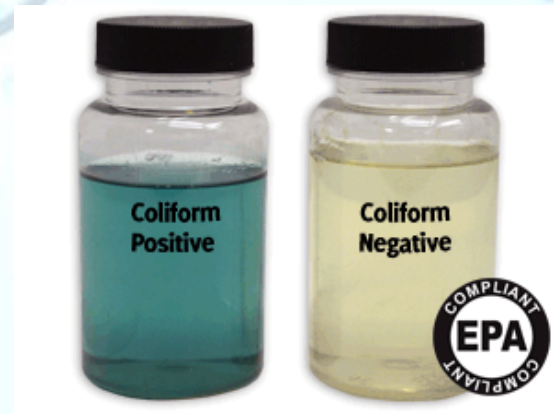
Because coliform bacteria have the potential to make persons who consume it ill, we **strongly recommend** you have your water tested. In addition, it is helpful to know if your water contains

nitrates/nitrites that can harm infants in a short period of time. If coliform bacteria is found in the sample, it’s important to note there are many possible sources, such as the well, water pressure tank, water treatment equipment, plumbing, or a filter on the faucet.

If the nitrate/nitrite level is above 10 milligrams per liter (mg/L) or parts per million (ppm), the water is not safe for infants, pregnant women or nursing mothers to drink.

## Coliform Bacteria

Coliforms are bacteria that are naturally present in the environment and are used as an indicator that other, potentially-harmful, bacteria may be present. For more information on bacteria in drinking water visit [extensionpubs.unl.edu](http://extensionpubs.unl.edu) and search for [NebGuide G1826](#).



Fecal coliforms and *E. coli* are bacteria whose presence indicates that the water may be contaminated with human or animal wastes. Microbes in these wastes can cause short-term effects, such as diarrhea, cramps, nausea, headaches, or other symptoms. They may pose a special health risk for infants, young children, some of the elderly, and people with severely-compromised immune systems.

## Nitrates

Nitrates in drinking water at levels above 10 ppm can cause shortness of breath and blue baby syndrome for infants of less than six months of age. If untreated, they may die. For this reason nursing or pregnant mothers, in addition to infants, are advised to not drink water that contains nitrates above 10 ppm. More information about arsenic can be found in [NebGuide G1784](#).



*Are You Testing Your Private Domestic Drinking Water Well Annually?*

## Other Contaminants

In some areas of the state, arsenic, uranium and/or selenium may be present. These are naturally occurring elements in the ground. If you are concerned, you may wish to have your well tested for these substances.

## Arsenic

Drinking water containing arsenic in excess of the maximum contaminant level (MCL) of 10 (micrograms)  $\mu\text{g}/\text{Liter}$  (L) over many years could cause skin damage or problems with circulation, and may increase the risk of getting cancer. More information about arsenic can be found in [NebGuide G1552](#).

## Uranium

Some people who drink water containing uranium in excess of the MCL of 30  $\mu\text{g}/\text{L}$  over many years may have an increased risk of getting cancer and kidney toxicity. More information about arsenic can be found in [NebGuide G1569](#).

## Selenium

Selenium is an essential nutrient. However, some people who drink water containing selenium in excess of the MCL of 50  $\mu\text{g}/\text{L}$  over many years could experience hair or fingernail losses, numbness in fingers or toes, or problems with their circulation.

**How can you protect yourself and your family? Have your water tested annually by contacting one of the following labs:**

### Nebraska Drinking Water Laboratories

(for coliform bacteria and nitrates)

DHHS Public Health Environmental Lab  
3701 S 14th St  
Lincoln, NE 68502  
402-471-2122

Central District Health Dept  
1137 S Locust St  
Grand Island, NE 68801  
402-385-5175

Enviro Services  
818 S Beltline, Hwy E  
Scottsbluff, NE 69361  
402-632-3933

Metropolitan Utility Districts  
2710 Grebe St  
Omaha, NE 68111  
402-504-7468

Midwest Laboratories  
13611 B St  
Omaha, NE 68144  
402-334-7770

American Agricultural Lab  
700 East D St  
McCook, NE 69001  
308-345-3670

For more information, contact:

DHHS – Division of Public Health  
Water Well Standards Program  
301 Centennial Mall South  
PO Box 95026  
Lincoln, NE 68509-5026  
402-471-0546

Meghan Sittler  
Nebraska Extension: Domestic Water  
Educator  
444 Cherrycreek Rd  
Lincoln, NE 68528-1591  
402-441-7180



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