

## Why Is My Water Tested For Coliforms?

Some diseases are spread through drinking water. Cholera, typhoid, hepatitis, giardiasis, and epidemic dysentery are a few of these waterborne diseases. Disease results when microorganisms (such as protozoa, bacteria, and viruses) infect our bodies in numbers great enough to over-power our natural defenses.



Sanitary procedures and water treatment methods can limit the spread of waterborne diseases. Fortunately, many steps are taken in this country to ensure the public is provided with safe drinking water. One of these methods is to test water for coliform bacteria.

## What Are Coliforms And What Do They Indicate?

Coliforms are a large group of bacteria that commonly live in the digestive tracts of humans and animals. For this reason, coliform bacteria are found in sewage and animal wastes. However, many coliforms are harmless and can be found in other places such as soil. Unfortunately, the tests for coliform bacteria do not indicate their source.

The presence of coliforms in drinking water indicates a possible contamination by sewage or animal wastes. Sewage and animal wastes contain many disease causing organisms in addition to coliforms. For this reason, disease causing organisms may be present whenever coliforms are found in drinking water.



Some of the particular types of coliform bacteria that are often tested for are “fecal coliforms” and *Escherichia coli* (*E.coli*). The presence of these organisms can help in the investigation of possible contamination.

## Why Not Test Directly For Disease Causing Organisms?

Many different organisms can cause diseases. Unfortunately, almost as many tests would be needed to check drinking water for all of them. Instead, health officials test water for coliform bacteria to see if disease causing organisms could be present. The advantages of using coliform bacteria are:



- In general, coliforms are longer living and easier to find than disease causing organisms.
- Disease causing organisms are usually more susceptible to some treatment methods than are coliform bacteria.
- If coliform bacteria are not present, there is good reason to believe that the water system is free of disease causing organisms.

## **What Happens If Coliforms Are Found In My Water?**

Finding coliform bacteria in the drinking water is a signal that your water system may be contaminated. Further investigation of your water system is necessary to make certain disease causing organisms are not present. To protect you from diseases, your water system manager should:

- Take necessary action to make certain the drinking water is free of disease causing organisms.
- Inform you of any steps you can take to protect your health until the problems are corrected.

For more information on drinking water refer to these additional brochures.

### **How Do I Test My Water For Bacteria?**

#### **What to Do When Your Water Sample Test Is Unsatisfactory?**

#### **The Abandoned Well**

#### **Why Is Protecting The Area Around Your Well Important?**

#### **Drinking Water For Emergency Use**

#### **Gardening In A Wellhead Protection Area Keeping Your Drinking Water Clean**

# Coliform Bacteria And Safe Drinking Water



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