Test Your Water for Coliform Bacteria

Tacoma - Pierce County Health Department
Healthy People in Healthy Communities

Information for Individual Well Owners

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Steps to Collect a Water Sample to Check for Bacteria

Coliform bacteria describes a group of bacteria that can cause illness in humans. *E.coli* is an example of coliform bacteria. We recommend you test for coliform bacteria at least once a year.

Contact a certified laboratory for a water sampling kit. A kit typically contains a:

- Sample bottle.
- Lab form.
- Rubber band.

Step 1:

Choose a sample tap that best represents the water in your distribution system. Avoid poor sample sites like swivel faucets, hot and cold mixing faucets (with a single lever), leaky or spraying faucets, drinking fountains, janitorial sinks, frost-free hose bibs, and faucets below or near ground level.

Step 2:

Remove any attachments from the faucet, including aerators, screens, washers, hoses and water filters. Disinfect the faucet by spraying it with a chlorine water solution.

Step 3:

Turn on the cold water only and let it run in a steady stream for at least 5 minutes. Before you collect the sample, turn the water down to a thin stream (about the width of a pencil), then let the water run 1 minute.

Step 4:

Avoid contamination while taking the sample—hold the bottle near the bottom with one hand, hold the top of the cap with the other, and then unscrew the cap. Don't set the cap face down, touch any part of the cap that touches the bottle, or let anything touch the rim or inside of the cap.

There may be some liquid or powder in the sample bottle to neutralize any chlorine that may be present.

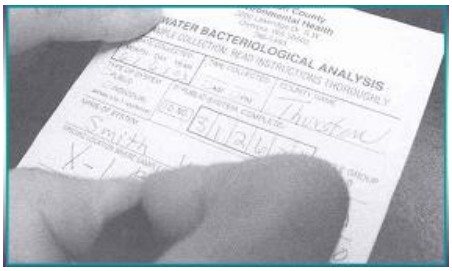
Don't rinse it out.

Step 5:

Hold the bottle under the stream of water, being careful not to let the bottle touch the sample tap. Fill the bottle to the neck or indicated fill line, but don't allow it to overflow. Remove the bottle from the water flow and replace the cap.

Step 6:

Complete the lab slip. If there was anything unusual about the sample collection, note it on the lab slip. Laboratory forms vary, but the following information is very important to complete:



- Collection date and time you took the sample.
- Sample location (street address or type of location identifier).
- Type of sample.
- If treated, check type of treatment (e.g. chlorine).

Step 7:

Secure the lab slip to the bottle with the rubber band. Deliver the sample to a certified lab or to a designated drop-off location for the lab as soon as possible. Lab analysis must begin within 30 hours of sample collection. View a list of certified testing laboratories. Refrigerate the sample if you are unable to make delivery to the lab within 1–2 hours of sample collection.

If you have questions or want more information about bacteria sample collection procedures, contact our Drinking Water Program at (253) 649-1420 or email us at ehdrinkingwater@tpchd.org.