

## How to Test for Bacteria in a Private Well

Until your private well test negative for bacteria such as fecal coliforms and *E. coli* it is recommended to boil water for human use until a negative report is received.

### How to collect a water sample for bacteria contamination

- A sterile bottle must be used to assure an accurate report. Sterile bottles can be picked up at your local NRD or Extension office
- The bottle may contain a small white pill or powder. If it does, leave the pill or powder in the bottle.
- Choose an inside faucet to collect the water sample with the aerator removed if one is present. Turn the water on cold water and allow it to run a minimum of 5 minutes. This assures that fresh water from the well is being collected instead of residual water in the pipes.
- Avoid touching or contaminating the inside of the bottle or cap. Carefully remove the lid from the sample containers and hold the cap by the outside of the cap. (If you touch the inside of the cap or bottle, you could contaminate the sample with bacteria)
- Fill the container with water to the marked line if a line is present. If no line is present, fill the bottle  $\frac{3}{4}$  full.
- Samples must reach the laboratory within 30 hours. Until sample can be shipped, keep it cool either in the refrigerator or a cooler. Avoid sending samples on Thursday or Friday because samples are not guaranteed to arrive prior to 30 hours after collection. (The Upper Elkhorn NRD office in O'Neill is also able to run bacteria samples. These samples must be to the NRD office within 2 hours after collection)

### Testing facilities

- Upper Elkhorn NRD Office – 301 North Harrison Street, O'Neill NE 68763 (402-336-3867)
- American Agricultural Laboratory – 700 East D Street, McCook, NE 69001 (308-345-3670)
- Central District Health Department – 1137 South Locust Street, Grand Island NE 68801 (308-385-5157)
- Enviro Services Inc. – 818 S. Beltline Hwy East, Scottsbluff, NE 69361 (308-632-3933)
- Midwest Laboratories, Inc. – 13611 B St., Omaha, NE 68144 (402-334-7770)

### What to do if water sample tests positive

It is recommended to shock the well with chlorine to kill the bacteria. For full instructions on how to shock a well refer to the NebGuide “Drinking Water Treatment: Shock Chlorination” found at [https://go.unl.edu/shocking\\_well](https://go.unl.edu/shocking_well). This publication will

help determine the amount of bleach that will need to be poured into the well depending on well diameter, volume of water, total depth of water, etc.

Sources:

“Drinking Water: Bacteria” -

<http://extensionpublications.unl.edu/assets/html/g1826/build/g1826.htm>

“How to Collect a Water Sample” - <https://agsci.psu.edu/aasl/water-testing/drinking-water-testing/how-to-collect-a-water-sample>