



2022 Flood Response

Private Well Screening for E. coli

- As of Thursday, June 23rd, the Stillwater County Extension office will begin offering free bacteria water testing. A portable Colilert lab has been set up and results should be available the following day.
- This program was quickly coordinated to streamline sampling for bacteria after flooding. The test provides reliable results for Total Coliform and E.coli, so that needed treatment can begin and safe drinking water restored as soon as possible. We are using EPA certified methods and equipment however this is not a state certified lab. If you need certified lab results, or want to test for other contaminants, you may prefer to use the Well Educated Program through Energy Labs in Billings, at your own cost. When a well is exposed to flooding, there is risk that waterborne pathogens have entered the water supply. Testing for bacteria (Total Coliform and E. coli) is used to determine if a well has been contaminated.
 - Presence of E. coli indicates contamination from a fecal source and the water should not be used until the well has been shock chlorinated.
 - Presence of Total Coliform does not indicate the same level of immediate health risk that E. coli does but does warrant follow up to verify that contamination is addressed.

Cost of this screening is covered by Montana State University Extension; at **No Cost** to well owners.

Sample must be dropped off:

between 8:00 AM and 2PM

on a Tuesday or Thursday

At the Stillwater County Extension Office 17 N 4th Street, Columbus MT

Sample must be collected within 6 hours of being dropped off and kept cool during transport.

If no one is in the office a cooler will be placed in the entry way to place your samples.

Results will be emailed to you from lees@montana.edu or stillwater@montana.edu. Please search your email for messages from this address in case the results go to junk mail or an unexpected folder.

Sample bottles are available at the Stillwater County Extension Office, Stillwater County Environmental health, or by mail. Please call if you are unable to get to Columbus to pick up bottles.

Sampling procedure on reverse side. Please read and follow all directions.

  17 N 4th St.
 PO BOX 807
Columbus, MT 59019

Contact Us

 stillwater@montana.edu
Lees@montana.edu

 406-322-8035

 <https://www.facebook.com/stillwatercountyextension>

 <https://stillwater.msuextension.org/>

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Sampling Instructions

1. Sample Bottles are available at Stillwater County Extension, and Stillwater County Environmental Health.
2. The **sample should be collected the same day it will be dropped off** for analysis. This is necessary so the sample is fresh enough to provide accurate results.
3. **Choose a location to sample your water.**
 - a. If you don't have any water treatment devices such as a water softener or carbon filter, you can take the sample from any cold water tap in the house.
 - b. If you do have a treatment device, you need to decide if you want to test before or after treatment. Sampling before the treatment system means you are testing your ground water. Testing after the treatment system means you are testing the quality of the water you are using.
 - c. If possible, choose a non-leaking, non-swivel, non-mixing faucet.
4. **Label the bottle** with your name as the sample ID, the date, and the time (preferably with permanent marker).
5. **Remove any faucet attachments** and aeration screens, then disinfect the mouth of the faucet with rubbing alcohol or bleach. If you are not diligent in this part of the process, you may get a false positive for coliform bacteria.
6. **For the sample**, let the water run for 2 to 3 minutes, then turn the faucet down to a pencil size stream of water. Let it run for an additional 2 minutes before collecting the sample. Break the seal on the bottle; the seal is verification that the bottle is sterile. Fill the bottle to the 100mL line then secure the lid firmly.
7. **Complete the registration form**, tear off last page to return, and place it in the Ziplock bag (to protect it from water that will condense on the sample bottle).
8. Place the sample and the registration sheet in the Ziplock bag for drop off.
9. **Drop the sample off** at the location and time indicated on the other side of this sheet.

Video on Sample Collection

For more guidance on collecting a water sample for bacteria, see a video on YouTube titled "Sampling for Well Water Quality." It is at the following link and can also be found from the MSU Extension Water Quality website. The video is 6 minutes and the portion specific to bacteria sampling is from 2:00-4:45.

<https://youtu.be/UT50Ymdkxtw>



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