

# Flooding Can Contaminate Your Well or Spring

Assume your water is contaminated if floodwater has reached your well or spring, and do not use it for drinking until you know it is safe. Water may not be safe to use for drinking, cooking or cleaning after a flood. During and after flooding, private wells and springs can become contaminated with bacteria, microorganisms and other pollutants from sewage, heating oil, agricultural or industrial waste, chemicals, and other substances that can cause serious illness.

## Flooding Near Your Well or Spring

Do not use the water from your well or spring until you have it tested and you know it's safe, especially if:

- It was or is covered with floodwaters or located near flooding
- It smells sweet or smells like fuel or chemicals, or is near a suspected fuel or chemical spill

## Inspect Your Water System for Flood Impacts

If you did not see the area during the flood, look for debris and mud in the area and water or mud stains on the well or in a spring. These are signs that your system was flooded.

1. If it is safe to do so, inspect electrical components:
  - Look for exposed/damaged wiring or electrical components.
  - Check whether water entered any electrical components. Do not touch electrical wires.
  - If electrical connections or controls located outside the well casing or spring box remain submerged, do not turn on the pump until the floodwater has gone down.
2. Check for damaged structural components of the water system.
  - Check the well casing - A bent/cracked well casing may allow water, sediment and debris to enter the well and increase the risk of contamination.
  - Check the well cap and seal to make sure they are securely fastened to the well casing. Sediment and debris may enter the well through a loose well cap.
  - Inspect spring box tiles and structural components to see if they are sealed and stayed in place.
3. If your water system appears severely damaged, call a [licensed well driller \(link in English\)](#) or your [regional engineer \(link in English\)](#).

4. If heating fuel or chemicals are known to have been spilled near your well or spring, call the [Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation \(DEC\) Spill Management \(link in English\)](#) during business hours (7:45 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.) at 802-828-1138 or outside business hours at 800-641-5005 to report the spill. **Do not drink the water** if you suspect a fuel or chemical spill has impacted your well or if your water smells sweet or like fuel or chemicals.
5. You may also be having problems with your septic system. [Find resources to help you with your septic system](#). The links on this page go to resources. To get information in another language, contact the Agency of Natural Resources at [ANR.CivilRights@vermont.gov](mailto:ANR.CivilRights@vermont.gov) or 802-636-7827.

## If Your Well or Spring Has Been Affected by Flooding

Bacteria are the most common drinking water contaminants after a flood. Bacteria can make you sick. Do not drink your water until you have it tested.

1. Until your water has been tested and your results show total coliform and E. coli bacteria were “not detected,” **do not use your water** for:
  - Drinking
  - Cooking
  - Washing dishes
  - Making juice or ice
  - Washing fruit and vegetables
  - Brushing teeth
  - Preparing baby formula
2. Get water from a known safe source.
  - Fill food-safe containers with water from a known safe source, like the town library, town hall, fire department, school, church or town office.
  - Buy bottled water.
  - Buy water from a bulk water hauler and fill up a water tank. Find a [list of bulk water haulers \(link in English\)](#) or search the internet for "bulk water haulers Vermont."
  - If you can't get water from a known safe source, **boil your water for one minute** to kill bacteria and other microorganisms that may be in the water. Do not boil water if you:
    - Smell or see signs of chemicals in your water

- Think there was a nearby fuel or chemical spill
- See that the water is cloudy or full of sediments.
- **Do not** fill your contaminated well or spring with water delivered by a water hauler. Instead, keep the water in food-safe containers.

## How to Test Your Drinking Water

1. Call the Health Department Lab at 802-338-4724 to order a bacteria test kit for \$14.
2. Before taking a water sample:
  - Remove any visible mud, sediment, and other debris from around the well casing or from within the spring box.
  - If your water is muddy or cloudy, run the water from an outside spigot with a hose attached until the water becomes clear and free of sediments. This may take 30 minutes to several hours or days, depending on the size and depth of the well or spring and extent of contamination.
3. Follow the instructions in the test kit for taking the sample. Make sure you are taking the sample the same day you are returning it.
4. Return the sample to the Health Department Lab or the closest local health office Monday through Thursday. [Check the schedule \(link in English\)](#) to see when the sample needs to be returned.
5. You should receive your bacteria results within two business days.
6. **Until the test results show that total coliform and E. coli bacteria were "not detected," do not use the water.** Get water from a safe known source or boil it for one minute before using it.

## After You Receive Your Water Results

- If your results show that bacteria were "detected," [follow steps to disinfect your well or spring \(link in English\)](#) after the floodwater has gone down. If you need help disinfecting your well or spring, contact a [local well driller \(link in English\)](#) or [water quality expert \(link in English\)](#).
- After disinfecting your well or spring, retest your water for bacteria 2 to 3 days after the smell of chlorine is gone. Call the Health Department Lab at 802-338-4724 to order a bacteria test kit for \$14.