

AAP News Parent Plus

Families with private wells should test water for safety

About 23 million Americans get their drinking water from private wells. If your family is among them, the water should be tested regularly to make sure it is safe to drink.

Well water can be contaminated by chemicals, toxins or organisms that can make children sick. Water also can become contaminated by climate change, fracking or disasters like floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes and wildfires. Pesticides, fertilizers or gas from leaking tanks near the well also can get into the water.

The American Academy of Pediatrics offers tips on inspecting and testing private wells to provide safe drinking water. Tests should be done once a year to see if water contains nitrates or coliform bacteria.

Nitrates are part of plants and are found in fertilizers. If well water has high levels of nitrates, it should not be used for infant formula or to prepare food. Boiling the water will not remove nitrates. Coliform bacteria are in the feces of people and animals.

Tests also should be done if people who drink the water get sick.

If tests show the water is contaminated, a professional contractor should inspect the well for structural issues. After the structure is deemed safe or repaired, a professional will use water test results to determine which treatment to use. A health department or professional contractor should address any issues and discuss treatment options.

Families can talk with their pediatrician about other ways to ensure well water is safe to drink and for formula.

— Steve Schering



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