

FAQ on Coliform (bacteria)

1. ***What is coliform?***

The presence or absence of the coliform group of bacteria is an indicator of the sanitary quality of water. Coliforms are more hardy than true pathogenic (disease causing) bacteria and their absence from water is a good indication that the water is bacteriologically safe for human consumption.

(Technically the coliform group of bacteria is “all aerobic and facultative anaerobic gram-negative, nonspore forming, rod-shaped bacteria that ferment lactose with gas formation within 48 hours at 35 degrees C.)

2. ***What is E.coli and Fecal coliform?***

Generally if your sample is positive for total coliform, we will also test it for the presence or absence of either E.coli or Fecal coliform. These bacteria are present in large numbers in the excrement of humans and other warm-blooded animals. The presence of E.coli or Fecal coliform is cause for immediate corrective action as discussed below.

3. ***How can coliform enter my water supply?***

Several possible ways include a.) Openings at the well cap area in which insects can enter b.) recent repair work in which the well or piping was exposed c.) Insufficient chlorination of new wells d.) inadequate sealing of the well casing with the soils e.) unclean water softener salt tanks and sediment filters f.) underground plumbing leaks g.) mechanical defects in your water system such as a water logged pressure tank which can cause the water to become discolored.

4. ***Coliform is in my water. Does this mean the aquifer is contaminated?***

Most likely no. In just about all cases, the aquifer is free of coliform. We conclude this because you can normally kill this bacteria by chlorinating your well system. However, extremely shallow wells (less than 30 feet) may not be in a bacteriologically safe aquifer.

5. ***What should I do if my water shows the presence of coliform?***

- a.) Seek an alternate source of water for drinking and cooking until your samples show the absence of coliform.
- b.) Check your well and treatment equipment for sanitary defects.
- c.) Have your water system chlorinated (disinfected) to kill this bacteria. Retest to determine effectiveness of the procedure.

6. ***Will coliform come back after it is gone from my water system?***

Possibly. Preventative steps include:

- a.) Waiting a day or longer once the chlorine has been flushed free from the well before collecting a check sample.
- b.) Promptly correcting any defects to your system.
- c.) Properly maintaining your water treatment system.
- d.) Having your water tested for coliform annually and after any well repair work.

7. ***What safety measures can I take to assure coliform free water?***

- a.) Follow the advice of 5 and 6 above.
- b.) Properly maintaining your water treatment equipment. This includes frequently changing sediment filters (cleaning out and rinsing the filter housing with chlorine bleach during changes and maintaining a clean water softener salt tank.