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# THE NORTH COUNTRY HEALTH EFFECT

A health & safety guide brought to you by the Clinton County Health Department.



**Safe drinking water**

**M**any of us do not give much thought to the water we drink, cook with, and clean with. We turn on the faucet and it's there. Most of us don't even think about whether or not our drinking water is safe. However, having access to clean, potable drinking water is one of the most important contributions to a community's overall health. The water you use daily can be provided to you in two ways. Either you get your water from a community (public) water system or from your own private source, like a well.

## Public water systems (PWS)

PWS are regulated and have to adhere to strict standards. They provide water to the public for human consumption (for drinking, bathing, showering, cooking, dishwashing, etc.) through pipes or other distribution systems. PWS are classified as community or non-community water systems.

**Community water systems (CWS)** provide water to the public year-round. These include municipally-owned (cities, towns, or villages) public water supplies and privately-owned water suppliers (such as homeowner associations, apartment complexes, and mobile home parks that maintain their own drinking water system).

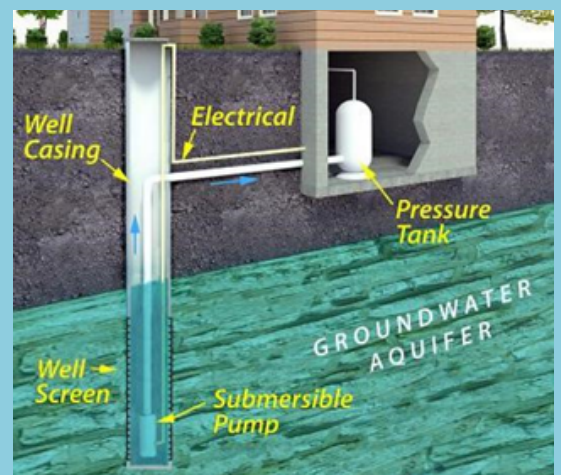
**Non-community water systems (NCWS)** are further classified as transient and non-transient. A transient NCWS provides water to different people for more than 6 months out of the year. Examples include rest stops, parks, convenience stores and restaurants with their own water supplies. A non-transient NCWS provides water to the same people for more than 6 months per year. Examples include schools, colleges, hospitals and factories with their own water supplies.



## Private wells

If you are not served by a public water system then you likely have a private well. There are three types of private drinking water wells: **shallow dug or bored; driven; and drilled wells.**

Generally, "drilled" wells are considered the safest for home water supplies. They have a lower risk of contamination due to their depth and they include a continuous casing (a pipe placed in the well to keep soil and excess surface water out). Some of the more common sources of contamination in our area for wells include septic systems, gasoline and fuel oil tanks, storage areas for pesticides or fertilizers, flood waters, animal waste and road salt storage.





## How do I know if my water is safe to drink?

In Clinton County, the Clinton County Health Department (CCHD) works to ensure safe drinking water is provided to the residents served by PWS. Private water sources, such as wells, are not regulated by CCHD. Homeowners are responsible to see that their water source is kept safe.

### Public water systems

- Are routinely tested for **total coliform bacteria** (see sidebar). Each PWS collects samples from their water supplies to test for the presence OR absence of total coliform bacteria.
- Are tested at least once per year for **nitrates** (see sidebar).
- Are tested for other chemicals or contaminants, depending on the type and size (population served) of the PWS. This may include: lead and copper, disinfection by-products, chemical contaminants, metals, and radiological contaminants.
- Disinfect their water supply.

### Private wells

Unless you test your private well water regularly, you may not know if your water is safe to drink. Test your drinking water:

- Yearly for bacteria and nitrates (see sidebar).
- At least every three years for other water contaminants to make sure nothing has changed. Long-term exposure to even low levels of contaminants can effect your health.
- When you are expecting a baby.
- When your water changes in smell, taste, or color. If this happens, drink bottled water and call CCHD at 518-565-4870 to find out which tests you should do.
- If you put in new parts to your water system, like a new pump or new water softener. Test for bacteria after disinfecting and flushing.
- If you put in a water treatment system to fix a problem. Test the treated water each year to ensure treatment is working properly.

## Water testing:

Testing for bacteria is the only reliable way to know if your water is safe. You can not tell by the look, taste, or smell of the water if disease-causing organisms are in your water.

### Total coliform:

Total coliform include bacteria that are found in the soil, in water that has been contaminated by surface water, and in human and animal wastes. Testing for total coliform bacteria can indicate if other pathogenic bacteria (germs that cause disease) are present, such as E. coli bacteria.

### Nitrates:

Nitrates are commonly used in fertilizers. They can enter the water supply from run-off from fields and lawns, failing septic systems, and animal wastes. Nitrates in water pose the greatest risk to infants under 6 months of age. Infants that drink water with a high level of nitrates can develop “blue baby syndrome.” The most common symptom is a blue discoloration of the skin around the mouth, hands, and feet. Other symptoms may include: shortness of breath, vomiting, diarrhea, and sleepiness. In severe cases, blue baby syndrome can cause death.



## Fluoridated water

Drinking fluoridated water keeps teeth strong and reduces cavities (also called tooth decay) by about 25% in children and adults. Community water fluoridation is the most efficient and cost-effective way to deliver fluoride to everyone in a community and is recommended by nearly all public health, medical, and dental organizations.

**In Clinton County, approximately 47% of residents receive fluoridated water.**

For more health & safety tips, visit  
<https://health.clintoncountyny.gov/nchealtheffect>  
or scan the QR code.



Information in this guide was adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)); the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH, [www.health.ny.gov](http://www.health.ny.gov)); and the American Red Cross ([www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)).

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