

Caring For Your Water Well During and After a Flood

Water wells can be contaminated by flooding. While this contamination may be associated with an unpleasant taste, odour, or cloudiness of the well water, some contamination will only become evident after water quality testing.

Under flood conditions surface water may enter directly into the aquifer via the well itself, an old abandoned well, or some other nearby excavation, bypassing the natural filtering process. Testing and rehabilitation efforts should be focused on potential bacterial contamination.

While the majority of water wells are likely unaffected, each homeowner should take certain steps to ensure their well water is safe for human consumption. As a first step, water from all wells in the flooded area should be tested for quality. In order to do this, you should obtain a bacterial sample bottle from your local public health office.

Until the bacterial analysis shows the water to be safe, all water for human consumption should be boiled. Bringing water to a rolling boil for 1 minute will kill most organisms. If you suspect or are informed that the water is contaminated with chemicals, seek another source of water such as bottled water.

If the bacterial analysis indicates that your water well has some level of contamination, then the well should be chlorinated and retested. Chlorination is a procedure used to disinfect a water well contaminated with bacteria. Contact your local Health Unit office for further information regarding the method of disinfecting a well.

If your well was unaffected by flood water, you may still wish to collect a water sample and disinfect your distribution system as a precaution. Experience has shown that not all of the water wells will have flood-related contamination. Some may have had problems prior to flooding and are now detected. Also, it is unlikely that all affected water wells will be satisfactory after a single treatment. Once a well has been chlorinated, it should be tested one or two weeks after treatment.