

What to Do with Your Well After a Flood

If your water well was recently or currently flooded, your water supply may be in danger of contamination from bacteria and chemicals present in flood waters. These bacteria and chemicals can seep down along the well casing, or travel underground from a nearby flooded well or waterlogged soils, even though your well may appear okay. This contamination can make your well water unsafe for drinking, cooking and preparing food, and washing. Wells in pits or basements are also at risk of flooding and contamination.

1. Stop Using Your Well Water and Switch to a Temporary Safe Water Source

- **Do NOT** turn on the well pump. There is a danger of electrical shock to you, and damage to your well and pump if they were flooded.
- If you suspect your water well may have become flooded or contaminated, immediately stop drinking it, or using it for cooking and washing.
- You should suspect contamination of your groundwater anytime your well casing gets flooded, or if you have a shallow well or well pit in an area prone to high surface run-off accumulating in and around your well. This may result in visible changes to your usual groundwater quality (i.e. water appears cloudy, has more sediment, has an unusual colour or odour).
- Use a temporary source of known, safe drinking water, such as from a municipal truck-fill, bottled water, or a neighbour's well that wasn't in danger of being flooded.
- If this is not possible, boil your well water for one minute at a rolling boil before using it.
- However, if you suspect chemical as well as bacterial contamination of your groundwater well, **do NOT** use the well water until a licensed water well contractor has had the opportunity to work on your well and until you've had your groundwater tested for chemical and microbiological contaminants from the flood waters.

2. Check Your Well and Pump

- Flood waters can carry debris like wood, rocks, and metal objects that may damage your well casing, or electrical components and the pump. This can be a serious problem for older wells.

- When the flood waters have receded, and you are certain that the well pump and electrical system are completely dry, have your area licensed water well contractor t check your well system. They may need to clean the water pump, including the valves and gears of any soil or sand that entered from the flood waters.
- Do NOT turn on the well pump until you have had the wiring system checked by a qualified electrician or the licensed water well contractor.

3. Have Your Well and Plumbing Disinfected

- Your water well and entire plumbing system connected to that well should be disinfected. It is recommended that a licensed water well contractor, who has the expertise and proper equipment to do this.
- Well owners may choose to disinfect their well and plumbing system themselves. They are recommended to follow the basic procedures outlined by the Alberta Working Well fact sheets (available at <http://environment.gov.ab.ca/info/library/5965.pdf>) or from factsheets available at your district AHS Environmental Public Health office.

4. Test Your Water Well

- Before you use your groundwater well again, have the water tested for coliform bacteria. You can get the bottles and instructions for testing from your district AHS Environmental Public Health Office. The district Public Health Inspector can advise you on what the laboratory results mean.
- If you suspect chemical contamination, as well as microbial contamination, consult with your district Public Health Inspector to arrange appropriate testing of your well water.

5. Protect Your Well from Future Floods

- Once the flood is over and your well is restored, check with your area licensed water well contractor to see what things you can do to make your well more flood-proof for the future.

For more information, please contact your nearest Environmental Public Health office.

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Calgary Main Office
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