



Private Wells

Groundwater is precipitation (rain or snow), surface water, and irrigation water that has absorbed into the ground where it collects beneath the land surface. It is one of our most valuable (and vulnerable) resources, although you probably never see it or realize it is there. Groundwater supports many aspects of life. It replenishes our streams and rivers; provides fresh water for irrigation, industry, and communities; and supplies drinking water to 95% of Idaho citizens. As Idaho's population grows, so does the need for clean, usable groundwater.



Private well versus a public water system

Wells provide Idahoans with groundwater for their drinking water, households, and irrigation water needs. A private (domestic) well supplies water to one or a few houses. Private wells serve any connection, or combination of connections, that does not meet the criteria of a public water system. Data from the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) indicates there are nearly 111,000 wells used as private drinking water sources.

A public water system serves at least 25 people or 15 connections at least 60 days of the year and is required to comply with the "Idaho Rules for Public Drinking Water Systems" (IDAPA 58.01.08), which includes monitoring for contaminants. Public water systems provide water to several houses or a community, such as a homeowner's association, businesses, or schools.

Whether you use a private well or are connected to a public drinking water system, the water that flows from your tap is likely groundwater.

Why test a private well?

No water quality regulations exist for private wells in Idaho. As a private well owner, you are responsible for your well and the safety of the drinking water from your well. Clear or clean-looking water may still contain harmful contaminants that are undetectable by taste, smell, or sight. These contaminants can cause both immediate and long-term health effects.

What to test?

The most common contaminants in Idaho's groundwater are nitrate and bacteria, both of which may cause immediate health effects. Bacteria is often tested as total coliforms or *Escherichia coli*. Contaminants such as arsenic, uranium, fluoride, and selenium may also be present in certain areas of Idaho. Lead from household plumbing can also be found in drinking water, particularly in older homes and buildings constructed before 1986. Additional contaminants considered by the United States Environmental Protection Agency's secondary drinking water standards are not direct human health hazards but cause issues with taste, odor, or color.

To determine which contaminants to sample, look at nearby well testing results at Groundwater Quality Near Me (QR code below), [IDWR Groundwater Quality Map](#), or [Contaminants in Drinking Water](#).

When to test?

All newly constructed wells, or existing wells on newly purchased property, should be tested right away. Sudden changes in water color, clarity, or odor also warrant water testing. Test your well if there are health concerns such as gastrointestinal illness. Additionally, conduct well testing after a significant flood or earthquake. The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW) suggests testing private wells according to this schedule:

Contaminants	How Often
Bacteria, Nitrate	Once a year (bacteria in spring)
Arsenic, Uranium, Fluoride, Selenium	Once every 3–5 years
Iron, Manganese, Sulfate*	Once every 2–3 years
Contaminants (Collected from Inside House)	How Often
Lead – Collect from cold water tap inside house, with aerator on, after water has been stagnant for at least 6 hours and no water has been used.	Once every 2–3 years

*EPA Secondary Drinking Water Standards.

More Information

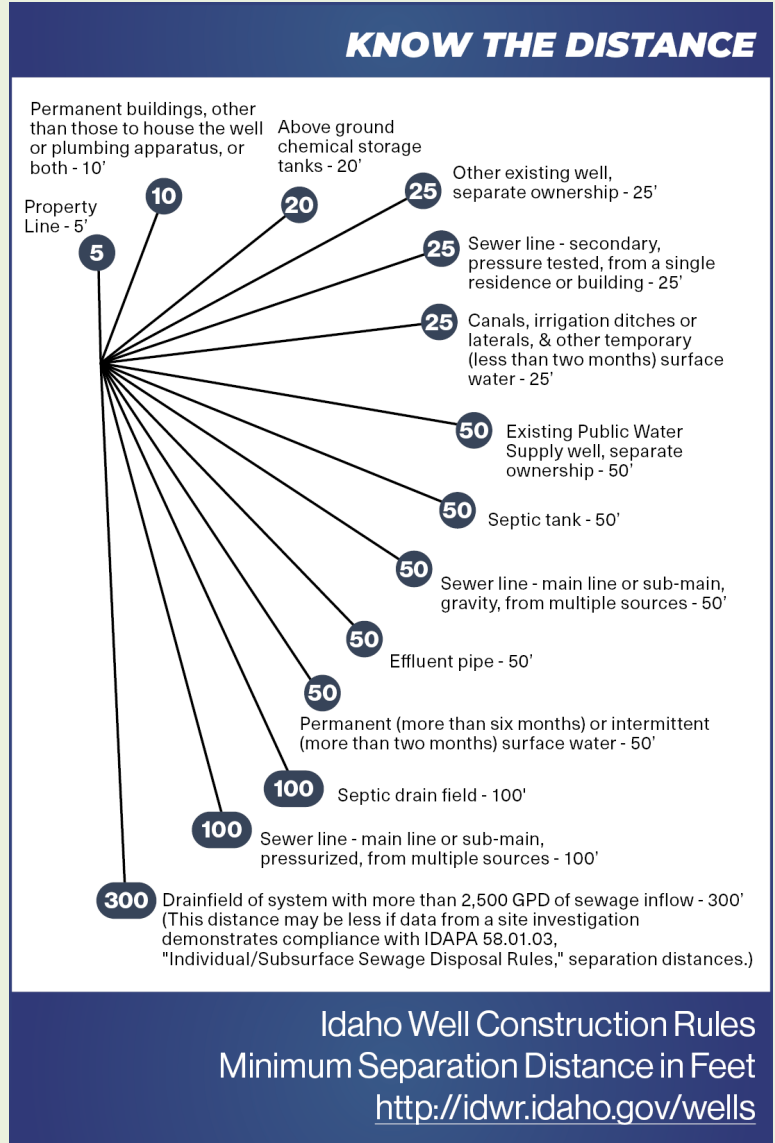
Learn more about private wells and how to take a sample for various contaminants:

[IDHW—Drinking Water](#)

[DEQ—General Information on Drinking Water](#)

[DEQ—Wells](#)

Scan the QR code for an interactive map showing groundwater quality conditions for Idaho’s private well owners.



STATE OF IDAHO
 DEPARTMENT OF
 ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY