

Flooding Can Contaminate Your Well or Spring

The information on this page is for residential private water systems (wells and springs). If you get your residential drinking water from a private intake of lake or surface water source, **do not use the water** and contact [Department of Environmental Conservation regional engineer](#) for guidance.

If you pay a water bill, you are on public water. Please go to [Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Flood Recovery website](#) for more information.

Assume your water is contaminated if floodwater has reached your well or spring, and do not use it for drinking until you know it is safe. Water may not be safe to use for drinking, cooking or cleaning after a flood. During and after flooding, private wells and springs can become contaminated with bacteria, microorganisms and other pollutants from sewage, heating oil, agricultural or industrial waste, chemicals, and other substances that can cause serious illness.

Flooding Near Your Well or Spring

Do not use the water from your well or spring until you have it tested and you know it's safe, especially if:

- It was or is covered with floodwaters or located near flooding
- It smells sweet or smells like fuel or chemicals, or is near a suspected fuel or chemical spill

Inspect Your Water System for Flood Impacts

If you did not see the area during the flood, look for debris and mud in the area and water or mud stains on the well or in a spring. These are signs that your system was flooded.

1. If it is safe to do so, inspect electrical components:
 - Look for exposed/damaged wiring or electrical components.
 - Check whether water entered any electrical components. Do not touch electrical wires.
 - If electrical connections or controls located outside the well casing or spring box remain submerged, do not turn on the pump until the floodwater has gone down.
2. Check for damaged structural components of the water system.
 - Check the well casing - A bent/cracked well casing may allow water, sediment and debris to enter the well and increase the risk of contamination.
 - Check the well cap and seal to make sure they are securely fastened to the well casing. Sediment and debris may enter the well through a loose well cap.

- Inspect spring box tiles and structural components to see if they are sealed and stayed in place.

If Your Well or Spring Has Been Affected by Flooding

1. Until your water has been tested, **do not use** it for:

- Drinking
- Cooking
- Washing dishes
- Making juice or ice
- Washing fruit and vegetables
- Brushing teeth
- Preparing baby formula

2. Get water from a known safe source.

- Fill food-safe containers with water from a known safe source, like the town library, town hall, fire department, school, church or town office.
- Buy bottled water. Find a [list of bottled water systems](#) that were tested for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).
- Buy water from a bulk water hauler and fill up a water tank. Find a [list of bulk water haulers](#) or search the internet for "bulk water haulers Vermont."
- If you can't get water from a known safe source, **boil your water for one minute** to kill bacteria and other microorganisms that may be in the water. Please note that boiling water may concentrate some common flood contaminants, like nitrates, that are especially harmful to young children. **Do not use boiled water for preparing baby formula.** Do not boil water if you:
 - Smell or see signs of chemicals in your water
 - Think there was a nearby fuel or chemical spill
 - See that the water is cloudy or full of sediments.
- **Do not** fill your contaminated well or spring with water delivered by a water hauler. Instead, keep the water in food-safe containers.

3. If heating fuel or chemicals are known to have been spilled near your well or spring, call the [Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation \(DEC\) Spill Management](#) during business hours (7:45 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.) at 802-828-1138 or outside business hours at 800-641-5005 to report the spill. **Do not drink the water** if

you suspect a fuel or chemical spill has impacted your well or if your water smells sweet or like fuel or chemicals.

4. Have your water tested even if there was no fuel or chemical spill. Bacteria and nitrate are some of the most common drinking water contaminants after a flood.
5. Before taking a water sample:
 - Remove any visible mud, sediment, and other debris from around the well casing or from within the spring box.
 - If your water is muddy or cloudy, run the water from an outside spigot with a hose attached until the water becomes clear and free of sediments. This may take 30 minutes to several hours or days, depending on the size and depth of the well or spring and extent of contamination.
6. If your water source is contaminated with bacteria, [disinfect your well or spring](#) after the floodwater has gone down. If you need help disinfecting your well or spring, contact a [local well driller](#) or [water quality expert](#).
7. **Until the test results show there are no bacteria or other harmful contaminants, do not use the water** for drinking, cooking and food preparation, making juice or ice, brushing teeth, washing dishes, making baby formula/bottles, or washing fruit and vegetables.
8. If you need help replacing a failed water system, call a [licensed well driller](#) or your [regional engineer](#) for information on permits and permit exemptions.

You may also be having problems with your septic system. [Find resources to help you with your septic system](#)

The links on this page go to resources. To get information in another language, contact the Agency of Natural Resources at anr.civilrights@vermont.gov or 802-636-7827.