What's In Your Water?

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New grant aims to increase private well testing among Vermonters

BURLINGTON – Although an estimated 40 percent of Vermont households drink water from private sources, only five percent of those private wells have been tested for contaminants. The Vermont Department of Health was awarded five years of federal funding in the amount of $670,010 to close this gap and promote safe drinking water for Vermonters.

Vermont is one of 14 state and five local health departments to receive funding from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to reduce contaminant exposures from private drinking water sources. Grant funds will be used to support water testing for vulnerable populations that are at greatest risk, especially children and pregnant women.

The CDC funding will also allow the Health Department to compile and analyze private well testing data to identify geographic areas where drinking water supplies may put vulnerable populations at increased risk of adverse health effects.

There are no federal or state requirements for testing private water sources, as opposed to public community water systems that are required by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to test for – and treat water for any contaminant above the level of concern.

Naturally occurring contaminants—such as arsenic and uranium—are colorless, odorless, and tasteless. Long-term exposure to these and other drinking water contaminants can have adverse health effects.

“Testing is the only way to determine if water contains contaminants,” said Sarah Vose, state toxicologist for the Health Department. “This grant will allow us to significantly increase our outreach and resources to educate Vermonters about the importance of private water testing.”

The Health Department offers test kits for sale to the public and recommends the following schedule for testing private water sources:

- Test for coliform bacteria every year.
- Test for inorganic chemicals every five years.
- Test for gross alpha radiation every five years.


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