Cities get their drinking water from municipal drinking water systems. Stringent regulations make sure this water is safe before people drink it.

But businesses located in rural or remote areas often use private wells or surface water sources such as rivers, lakes or ponds.

If your business makes drinking water available to the public, it’s your responsibility to take steps to ensure that it is safe to drink.

Businesses with this responsibility include restaurants, seasonal trailer parks, summer camps, community centres and many other public facilities.

This guide provides information to help you be certain your water is safe to drink.

Why is it important to have safe drinking water?
Unsafe water can cause diarrhea, nausea, abdominal cramps, fever, kidney failure and even death.

What are the regulations that apply to small businesses using private water supplies?

What changes to these regulations will be made?
Small drinking water systems are being transferred from the Ministry of the Environment to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

They will be governed by new regulations under the Health Protection and Promotion Act.

This means a new program from local boards of health. It means drinking water will be sampled, tested and treated.

Public health inspectors will inspect every small drinking water system in the province. They will decide how often owners and operators need to test their water—and what they must do to keep their drinking water safe.

Public health units will inform owners and operators when the new regulations are in effect.
How does water become contaminated?

Water can become contaminated with:

- Biological organisms, such as bacteria, parasites and viruses
- Chemical agents, such as nitrates
- Toxins created by algae in polluted water

How do I know my drinking water is safe?

- Keep good records of the source water and type of water supply.
- Keep water quality results available from local suppliers.
- Follow the notification requirements in Regulation 512.
- Contact your local public health unit and the MOE Spills Action Centre (MAC). If your test results say your drinking water is unsafe, then you must:
  - Stop using the water supply for drinking or cooking.
  - Notify others to avoid drinking the water.
  - Follow the notification requirements in Regulation 512.
  - Contact your local public health unit and the MOE Spills Action Centre (MAC).

How do I know what type of water treatment to install?

Treatment depends on the type of contamination. The two main treatments are filtration and disinfection.

Points you should remember:

- Filtration installed at key points in the water system will remove particulate and some parasites.
- Disinfection systems such as chlorination or ultraviolet light treatment will reduce harmful bacteria.

Specialized water treatment devices are available to remove chemicals from the water. Consult with your local supplier for the best choices for your system.

The source of your water supply and type of contamination will determine if you need to use both filtration and disinfection treatments. Get advice from a water treatment specialist in choosing the best ways to make your drinking water safe.

For more information about the regulations under the Safe Drinking Water Act, and how they apply to you, contact the Ministry of the Environment at:


Spills Action Centre handles water spills and other environmental emergencies. Inquiries about other environmental issues should be directed to the:

Spills Action Centre
5775 Yonge Street
5th floor
North York ON M2M 4J1
1-800-565-4923.

To get a copy of the Ontario Drinking Water Quality Standards (O.Reg. 232/05), directed to the:

Ontario Environment Minister (Ontario Ministry of the Environment)

To find out if your public health unit has a Water Quality Team, go to the Ministry of Health Protection and Promotion Act at:

1-800-505-4923.

The Spills Action Centre handles water spills and other environmental emergencies. For information about other environmental issues, contact the Spills Action Centre at:

For general information about drinking water safety, contact your local health unit for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s information kit. It is called “Keeping Your Well Water Safe to Drink.”

What websites will help me?

- sps.actioncentre.on.ca
- Ontario drinking water regulations (O.Reg. 232/05) and acceptable levels set out in the Ontario Drinking-Water Quality Standards (O.Reg. 232/05). Monthly water samples are collected, stored and transported in bags that are higher than the acceptable levels set out in the Ontario Drinking-Water Quality Standards. Monthly sampling isn’t actually required by the current regulation (O.Reg. 232/05). Regular results help identify problems with your water supply.

How should I be doing anything different to prepare for my risk assessment under the new regulations?

- Post notices to get the water out.
- Post notices at all taps.
- Discuss the problems with your local public health inspector.

What else should I know about testing my water supply?

- Test your water with a disinfection device.
- Collect samples in bottles provided by the lab.
- Keep samples in the refrigerator, but do not freeze.
- Submit samples to the lab within 24 hours.

Positive test results may mean harmful bacteria are in the drinking water. Monthly sampling isn’t actually required by the current regulation (O.Reg. 232/05). Regular results help identify problems with your water supply.

Disinfection systems such as chlorination or ultraviolet light treatment will reduce harmful bacteria.

What do I do if my test results for bacteria are “adverse” or “unacceptable”?

- Check regulations to see how often samples are collected.
- Submit samples to the lab.
- Keep these contaminants away from your water.

If your test results say your drinking water is unsafe, then you must:

- Stop using the water supply for drinking or cooking.
- Notify others to avoid drinking the water.
- Contact your local health unit for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s information kit. It is called “Keeping Your Well Water Safe to Drink.”

What do I need to know about collecting water samples?

- Take good care of the pipes, pumps, valves, storage tanks, reservoirs, motors and fittings.
- Check your water system from the water source to the tap.
- Consider a preventative maintenance program. Stopping the problem before it reaches your tank.
- If you’re using chloride to disinfect your water, test regularly. Few tests that the water quality regulations from local suppliers.
- Check your equipment regularly to make sure it’s working properly.

- Take appropriate steps after consulting with your local public health inspector and MOE provincial officer.

- Disinfection systems such as chlorination or ultraviolet light treatment will reduce harmful bacteria.
- Specialized water treatment devices are available to remove chemicals from the water. Consult with your local supplier for the best choices for your system.
- The source of your water supply and type of contamination will determine if you need to use both filtration and disinfection treatments.
- Get advice from a water treatment specialist in choosing the best ways to make your drinking water safe.

For the best treatment, buy only devices that have been certified and meet industry standards. For information about the Ministry of the Environment at:


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