

# WELL WATER

## IN TILLAMOOK COUNTY, OR

Clean, safe, accessible drinking water is one of the single most important resources for human health. Private domestic wells are the only unregulated source of drinking water in the United States, meaning there are almost no requirements for testing the quality of the water and no requirements to treat contaminated water. In Oregon, well water testing is only required for real estate transactions (when land with a well is bought or sold), and tests are not always reported.

### HOW DO WELLS WORK?

Public water systems pump treated water to homes and businesses, who usually pay a monthly bill for the water they use. By comparison, private wells don't pay a fee to use their water, but they are responsible for any treatment or maintenance required by their water or well system.

Well water typically comes from the groundwater aquifer, or water found in the rock and soil deep underground. This water has been filtered as it travels through layers of earth, making it typically safe to drink, although it can be contaminated by a number of sources.

A private well is a hole that is dug, bored, or drilled far enough down to reach this groundwater aquifer. A well casing and well screen are used to line the well and prevent surface water, dirt, or other contamination from getting into the groundwater. A pump then pulls the water up from the aquifer to the surface for use in your home.

### QUESTIONS?

Contact Tillamook County Public Health

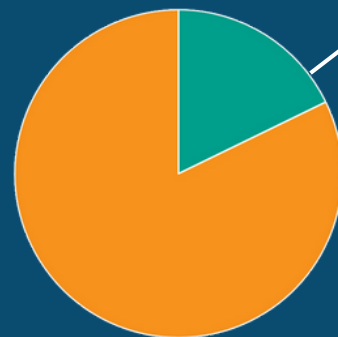
- 503-842-3909
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### WELLS IN TILLAMOOK COUNTY

**1800**

Approximate number of private wells in Tillamook County



**17.8%**

Estimated percentage of Tillamook County population that uses private wells

**9**

Number of arsenic tests reported by Oregon Health Authority (OHA) in Tillamook County

Number of nitrate tests reported by OHA in Tillamook County

**109**

**10%**

Percentage of OHA-reported tests in Tillamook County with elevated nitrate levels (above 3 parts per million (ppm))

**1%**

Percentage of OHA-reported tests in Tillamook County with nitrate levels above the 10 ppm Maximum Contaminant Level set by the U.S. EPA

## CONTAMINANTS & HEALTH

Drinking contaminated water can harm your health. It may cause headaches, fatigue, or gastrointestinal (stomach & digestive system) symptoms like diarrhea or nausea, and it can lead to more serious issues like higher risk of respiratory infection, birth defects, or cancer. Different contaminants have different health effects, so it's important to be aware of your risks and take action if you think your water might be contaminated.

Most contaminants do not have a color, taste, or smell. This means that the only way to know for sure that your well water is safe is to test it regularly. It's also important to know what contaminants are common in your area and what to do if you have any problems with your well or your water.

Leading health organizations commonly recommend regular testing for total coliform bacteria (including E. coli), nitrates, and arsenic. Testing is especially important if you have someone at high risk living in your home, such as any infants or young children, pregnant persons, older adults, or people with compromised immune systems.



To learn more about well contaminants and view sources, visit our website: [tillamookchc.org/wells](https://tillamookchc.org/wells)

## PUBLIC HEALTH & WELL TESTING

Because clean water is so important to human health, many public health agencies like the EPA, CDC, and OHA work to educate people on well water.

There are many different contaminants that can get into your well water and harm your health. Some come from natural sources, such as the rock underground or soil runoff, and others come from damage to the well or human sources like pesticides and agriculture activities. Water quality can change over time due to natural shifts in groundwater, changes in human activity, or damage to your well system.

We are also seeing increases in extreme weather events and natural disasters, like flooding, wildfires, power outages, heat waves, and drought. These can all affect the amount and quality of groundwater that is available and can affect well users' ability to access their well water (such as during a power outage).

While experts recommend testing well water at least once a year for certain contaminants, many people don't test their wells every year (or at all). Testing can be expensive, may not be available locally, or may be inconvenient to access. Many well users don't know how often they're supposed to test their water, and those that do may think treating the water is too expensive, or just don't want to know if there is a problem. Water testing can also be difficult for people who rent their home (a large portion of Tillamook County), because they might not be able to do anything if the water is contaminated.

Tillamook County Public Health is interested in learning more about well water in Tillamook County and encourages well users to educate themselves and test their well water regularly. If you get your water from a private well, visit the resources on our website and learn more about your well and how you can protect your health.

