
INFORMATION BULLETIN

July 29, 2015

Private water system testing reminder and information for the Peace Region
Includes information for First Nations communities

Northern Health recommends that all people on private water supplies test their drinking water regularly and at least annually for coliform bacteria and E. coli, and every five years for chemical parameters including arsenic. Homeowners are responsible for the testing of their own private wells. For those who rely on community water systems, these water systems are already tested routinely. The community water system results are available at www.healthspace.ca/nha. For First Nations communities, the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) regularly tests community water systems, including individual wells, for compliance with the Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water through the FNHA Drinking Water Safety Program.

Groundwater in the Peace Region can contain levels of naturally occurring arsenic above the Canadian Drinking Water Guideline of 10 micrograms per litre (or 0.01 mg/L). Health Canada's guideline is not completely risk-free; it is based on what is readily achievable with common treatment equipment. Arsenic can cause cancers and other chronic health effects over a lifetime of ingestion. Arsenic in water is a problem only if it is being used for drinking or preparing food. There are no known health effects from hand washing, bathing, or washing clothing in water with elevated arsenic.

Test results for First Nation community water systems in the area indicate that arsenic does not exceed guidance levels. Individual wells that were tested for arsenic also show compliance with guideline levels. First Nations community members who have questions concerning water quality can contact their First Nations Health Authority Environmental Health Officer for further information <http://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/environmental-health>.

If a private well owner receives an initial test result that detects arsenic greater than the drinking water guideline, it may be important to have a second test done to confirm the results. If follow-up testing shows consistent exceedances of drinking water guidelines, then residents should consult with an experienced water treatment professional, and obtain several independent quotes before purchasing any water treatment devices. Ultraviolet irradiation and sediment filters do not remove arsenic from water. Boiling water may increase the concentration of arsenic and make the problem worse. There are several treatment options for removing arsenic including reverse osmosis and other special filtration systems.

For more information on accredited labs see the link for Provincial Health Officer approved water testing labs at <http://lmlabs.phsa.ca/AboutUs/OurLaboratories/Enhanced+Water+Quality+Assurance+Program.htm>

For more information pertaining to drinking water and other services:

- Watch the video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0KvgITLo5LY>
- Visit the Northern Health website <https://northernhealth.ca/YourHealth/EnvironmentalHealth/DrinkingWaterSafety.aspx>
- Health Link File - Should I Get My Well Water Tested? <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile05b.stm>
- Health Link File - Arsenic in Drinking Water <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile49c.stm>
- Contact the Northern Health Drinking Water Program staff at 1-250-565-2150, OR
- Email publichealth.protection@northernhealth.ca
- For more information on First Nations Health Authority Environmental Health visit: www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/environmental-health

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