



Barry-Eaton District Health Department

Be Active • Be Safe • Be Healthy

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All about Wells

What is a well?

On-site wells provide household water to many families in our communities. Most households that aren't connected to city water get their water—including their drinking water—from wells that are right on their properties. But what is a well? A well is a hole drilled in the ground to an area that holds water. A pipe and a pump pull water out of the ground, and a screen filters out particles—like tiny rocks—that no one wants to drink. Wells come in different shapes and sizes, depending on the ground the well is drilled into and how much water is being pumped out.

Where does the water come from?

Underground water, or groundwater, comes mostly from rain and snow trickling down through rocks and soil. This water collects in the tiny spaces between soil and rock particles. When all of those spaces are filled up with water, an aquifer is formed. Wells draw their water from aquifers.

How do wells get contaminated?

Groundwater can be contaminated by many things, including chemicals, gasoline, road salt, and anything else that can trickle into the ground or pollute rain. A septic system that is failing and not functioning properly can also contaminate water if it releases household wastewater before it has been treated completely. "Protected" aquifers, which most permitted drinking wells are drilled into, are usually shielded from this contamination by clay or rock layers. However, sometimes surface contamination can flow past the barriers. This often happens due to old, unplugged wells, which provide a route from the ground surface to an aquifer. This is why it is very important to plug wells when they are no longer being used.

Do you have a well?

If you live a rural area, you probably have an on-site well. The biggest sign is if you do not pay a monthly water bill! But, because most of a well is underground, you might not easily notice that you have one. Even if you do know that you have a well, you might not know where it is. The part of the well that you can see is called a wellhead. This is usually a piece of pipe, with a cap, that sticks one foot or more out of the ground.

Keeping your water safe

Because wells provide your family and your community with drinking water, it is important to have a functioning and properly maintained well. To keep your well water safe, follow these guidelines:

- **Have a well cap in good condition.** The well cap keeps potential above-ground contaminants, like insects and animals, out of your well water.
- **Protect your well from damage.** Make sure you know the location of the wellhead. Use caution when working around your wellhead so that you don't hit or damage it. Don't pile leaves, rocks, or other materials over the wellhead.
- **Protect your well from contaminants.** Keep a "safe zone" of 50 feet around your well. Don't store chemicals or have animals or animal pens inside the safe zone. Ensure that your septic system is at least 50 feet away.
- **Test your water.** Well water should always be checked if you notice a change in its taste, smell, or color. In addition, testing your well water every year is strongly recommended. These tests should check for bacteria and chemicals, especially nitrates. BEDHD has free water sampling kits available (although labs charge a fee to run the samples). Instructions for water sampling can be found at <http://bit.ly/1JAzINK>.

Additional resources available:

For more information about wells, visit <https://www.epa.gov/privatewells>. Local resources are also available on the BEDHD website at <http://www.barryeatonhealth.org/services/environmentalhealth> or by visiting or calling one of the below BEDHD offices. If you don't have an on-site well and are interested in learning about the quality of your water, visit <http://bit.ly/29xLZby>.

Hastings office: (269) 945-9516, Ext. 353
330 W. Woodlawn Avenue

Charlotte office: (517) 541-2615
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Image for inclusion below; from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

