



# Marquette County Health Department

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FRED J. BENZIE, M.P.H., R.S., HEALTH OFFICER



## NEWS RELEASE

### Well Water Should Be Tested Annually to Reduce Health Risks

To: Marquette County News Media  
From: Fred Benzie, Health Officer, 475-9977  
Date: May 27, 2009  
For Immediate Release

The Marquette County Health Department recently received guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) to recommend that private well water should be tested yearly, and in some cases more often, especially if young children drink well water. Fred Benzie, MCHD Health Officer states that with proper well construction and testing, well water is safe; however, wells can become contaminated by chemicals or pathogenic organisms. Benzie states that the recommendations include annual well testing, especially for nitrate and microorganisms such as coliform bacteria, which can indicate that sewage has contaminated the well. The recommendations point out circumstances when additional testing should occur, including testing when there is a new infant in the house or if the well is subjected to structural damage.

"Children are especially vulnerable to waterborne illnesses that may come from contaminated wells," said Walter J. Rogan, M.D., an epidemiologist at NIEHS and lead author on the policy statement and technical report that appears in the June issue of Pediatrics. The new policy statement, "Drinking Water from Private Wells and Risks to Children," offers recommendations for inspection, testing and remediation of wells providing drinking water for children.

Nitrate, which comes from sewage or fertilizer, is the most common contaminant in wells. The presence of nitrates can be a problem particularly for infants under three months who can not metabolize nitrate. Water with a nitrate concentration of more than 1.0 milligrams per liter should not be used to prepare infant formula or given to a child younger than one year. The policy statement suggests using bottled water for infants when nitrate contamination is detected, or when the source of drinking water is not known.

Benzie states that many people with seasonal camps already test their water as part of camp opening. However, many people have not made it a habit to test the well serving their primary residence annually. In Marquette County approximately 50% of the population relies upon wells for their drinking water. The vast majority provide a safe water supply. Benzie states that a few wells in the County become contaminated each year, from a variety of sources including contamination from a failed septic system or due to excessive lawn fertilization which contains high levels of nitrates. It's important that people test their drinking water well for contamination. It's cheap insurance knowing that you and your family are protected from waterborne diseases and that your water is safe to drink.

For more information, regarding how to obtain water testing containers and which labs are certified to test drinking water you can contact the Environmental Health Division at 475-4195, or visit [www.mqthealth.org](http://www.mqthealth.org).

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