



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

## La Crosse County Health Department

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### News Release

**For Immediate Release: EMBARGO UNTIL APRIL 6, 2017 @ 2:30 pm**

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#### **Health Advisory Relating to Drinking Water Quality Concerns in Private Wells in Parts of La Crosse County**

The La Crosse County Health Department has identified that a concerning amount of private wells in the western half of the Towns of Holland and Onalaska have elevated nitrates and presence of bacteria in their drinking water. Residents living in the affected areas were sent health advisory letters this week.

Testing of private wells is the only way to determine if nitrates and bacteria are present. Testing annually for both nitrates and bacteria is recommended for all private wells. City municipalities regularly test city drinking water to assure water safety for residents.

**Concerns for infants and pregnant women:** nitrate levels higher than 10 mcg/mL (or 10 ppm) exceed state and federal standards for nitrates in public drinking water supplies. Infants less than 1 year of age or females who are pregnant or may become pregnant should not consume water that exceeds this standard. Infants less than 1 year of age who drink this water (including in formula) may experience nitrate poisoning, which requires timely medical attention. Levels greater than 10 mcg/mL may also cause birth defects in the first weeks of pregnancy.

**Concerns for all persons:** the Department of Health Services recommends that all people avoid long-term consumption of water that has a nitrate level greater than 10 mcg/mL. Some researchers suspect there may be an increased risk of thyroid disease, diabetes, and certain types of cancer.

Nitrate is a compound made up of nitrogen and oxygen. In nature, water usually contains less than 1 mcg/mL of nitrate. The use of lawn and agricultural fertilizers containing nitrate, soil type (especially sandy soil), the disposal of animal wastes, faulty septic systems, and changes in land use are factors for increases in ground water nitrate levels.

The nitrate levels of concern in the affected La Crosse County areas are between 10.1 – 20.0 mcg/mL. Levels above 20.1 mcg/mL have also been recorded. If water testing results exceed the 10 mcg/mL, it is recommended that you use bottled water for drinking, including preparation of infant formula, and cooking. A treatment system, such as a Reverse Osmosis System, or drilling a new or deeper well are possible solutions to remove nitrates.

The presence of bacteria in drinking water, especially *E.coli*, can cause nausea, vomiting, fever and diarrhea. Some bacteria do not cause illness in healthy individuals, but presence in well water indicates your water system is at risk for more serious forms of contamination.

Water suspected of being contaminated by bacteria should be boiled for 5 minutes before drinking to kill the bacteria. However, boiling water increases nitrate levels, so use bottled water if nitrates are also high.

**Water Testing:** Water testing kits are available at the La Crosse County Health Department Monday through Friday 8:00 am – 4:30 pm. Test kits may also be available at your local village/town hall or library. The cost for water testing is \$26.00 for nitrates and \$26.00 for bacteria at the La Crosse County Health Department. Testing is also available at Davy Laboratories in La Crosse, WI State Lab of Hygiene, UW-Stevens Point, and Eau Claire City-County Health Department. Prices at different testing sites vary.

### Where can I get more information?

#### Public Information Meetings:

**Wednesday April 12, 6:00 pm:** Holland Town Hall, W7937 County Road MH, Holmen

**Website:** The following information is available on the Health Department's website (will be posted @ 2:30 pm): [www.lacrossecounty.org](http://www.lacrossecounty.org) > News and Information:

To view a map of the affected areas, see the following link from UW Extension, UW Stevens Point Groundwater Center's Groundwater Quality Viewer:

[https://gissrv2.uwsp.edu/cnr/gwc/pw\\_web/](https://gissrv2.uwsp.edu/cnr/gwc/pw_web/).

Nitrate in Drinking Water: <http://dnr.wi.gov/files/PDF/pubs/DG/DG0001.pdf>

Bacteriological Contamination of Drinking Water Wells:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/files/PDF/pubs/DG/DG0003.pdf>

Nitrate in Groundwater: <http://aqua.wisc.edu/publications/pdfs/nitratefactsheet.pdf>

Tests for Drinking Water from Private Wells:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/regulations/labcert/documents/testsforwell.pdf>

**Call: Great Rivers 2-1-1** for general information on testing well water for nitrates or bacteria; simply dial 2-1-1.

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