
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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Drinking Water Safety Requirements and Recommendations for Child Care Programs

Who is Responsible for Making Sure Your Water is Safe to Drink?

Child care facilities fall into three categories with respect to drinking water safety:

- ◆ **Served by a public water system** – Many child care facilities are served by “community” public water systems, such as municipal systems, that bill their customers for water. These systems provide their customers with an annual water quality report (sometimes called a consumer confidence report). If you don’t have a copy of the most recent report from your water system, you may contact them or the N.H. Department of Environmental Services (DES). Child care centers located in commercial buildings that are not served by community public water systems might be served by the building’s “non-transient, non-community” public water system. These systems are also regulated by DES. Child care center operators can contact the building owner or DES for more information.

- ◆ **Have their own wells and have 25 or more staff and children on any given day** – These facilities are considered “non-transient, non-community” public water systems and are regulated by DES. These centers are **required** to have a licensed water system operator, to treat water as necessary to meet federal and state health-based standards, and to test the water to ensure that they are meeting those standards.

- ◆ **Have their own wells but have fewer than 25 staff and children on any given day** – These centers have private wells, which are **not** regulated by DES. The most critical aspects of drinking water safety are currently addressed by the N.H. Department of Health and Human Services’ (DHHS) Child Care Licensing Unit, but many are not. Specifically, DHHS licensing requirements address lead and several acute contaminants (those that can cause illness quickly) including bacteria, nitrate, and nitrite. For more information about licensing requirements, visit www.dhhs.nh.gov/oos/cclu/index.htm or call (603) 271-9025. Aspects of drinking water safety at these facilities that are **not** currently addressed either by child care center licensing requirements or DES rules include arsenic and manganese—both of which are naturally occurring and very common in New Hampshire well water—and a number of less common contaminants.

Water Testing Recommendations

If your facility is served by a public water system, DES recommends that you have the water that you use tested for lead and copper. Even if the water provided by your water system meets health-based

standards, it could pick up lead or copper from the plumbing and faucets in your building. DES recommends that you perform a “stagnant” test to check for lead and copper, which involves letting water stand overnight in the pipes. Your testing laboratory should provide you with instructions on collecting a sample.

If your facility is considered a *public water system* (there were 65 such child care programs in 2012) and are regulated by DES, you are already performing the necessary testing.

If your facility uses a private well, DES recommends that you have the water tested according to DES’s recommendations for private wells. You need to test the water to know what is in it; many contaminants are odorless and tasteless and your neighbor’s well test cannot tell you the quality of your water. Search the internet for “DES private well testing” or call DES at (603) 271-2513 for information on testing recommendations. To understand your testing results, see the fact sheets for each contaminant on the DES website; search for “DES drinking water fact sheets.” Keep records of your water tests for future reference.

If any water tests indicate contaminants at levels of concern, call DES at (603) 271-2513 to discuss treatment recommendations. *The most important step you can take for drinking water safety is to make an informed decision about treatment based on the results of testing done by a NHELAP-accredited laboratory.*

Even if your last water test was satisfactory, changing conditions can affect your water quality. Regular testing can help detect problems early, and establish a record of your water supply quality.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Minimize Lead Levels in the Water You Use for Food and Beverage Preparation

Water from your water heater is more likely to have high levels of lead. Use cold water to prepare food and beverages. For hot beverages, heat water from the cold tap on the stove or in a microwave oven. Clean debris from faucet screens frequently. Instruct staff to run the water first thing in the morning to clear out water that has been standing in the plumbing overnight.

Share Information with Families

If your facility is served by a community public water system, post the annual water quality report in your center or otherwise share it with families. If you have your water tested, post the most recent results or otherwise share them with families. To show that you are concerned about the safety of the water the children drink, provide copies of DES’s private well testing flyer to families who use private wells at home. You can obtain copies of “Protect Your Family – Test Your Well’s Water Quality Today” in both English and Spanish by calling DES at (603) 271-2513.

Well Construction and Protection

Well drillers and well pump installers are licensed and regulated by DES. Make sure that anyone who works on your well is licensed to do so. Also, perform a well check-up each spring to ensure that the well cover is in good shape and you are taking steps to prevent contamination of the well. For a well check-up checklist, search the internet for “DES checklist inspecting well” or call (603) 271-2513.

Prevent Contamination of Your Well

In addition to keeping the well itself in good shape, keep in mind that what is in or on the ground near the well can affect the water that you take from the well. Focus on the area within 100 feet of your well.

In this area, avoid: keeping compost or manure piles; storing or applying chemicals, pesticides, or herbicides; parking motor vehicles; fueling yard equipment; stockpiling snow removed from roads or parking lots treated with salt. If you have a septic system, make sure that it's well maintained.

If You Use Bottled Water

Bottled water is regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and by a number of state authorities. In New Hampshire, bottled water facilities are licensed and inspected by DHHS, which also reviews testing results for in-state bottled water and beverages to determine compliance with New Hampshire and federal standards for quality and safety. FDA's standards for bottled water quality generally mirror the federal drinking water standards, although the testing information that FDA requires bottlers to provide to consumers is less than what is required of public water systems. More information can be found on some bottlers' websites and some state health agency websites, or by contacting DHHS at (603) 271-4673.

For More Information

Please contact the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at (603) 271-2513 or dwgbinfo@des.nh.gov or visit <http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/dwgb/index.htm>. All of the bureau's fact sheets are available at <http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/pip/factsheets/dwgb/index.htm>.

Note: This fact sheet is accurate as of April 2013. Statutory or regulatory changes or the availability of additional information after this date may render this information inaccurate or incomplete.