

The 5 W's of Wells and Water Quality.

By: Chrissy Lucas, EPA2



Who: Every person who has a domestic well that is being used (or could be) for a drinking water source.

What: Have the well water tested for items that could cause health problems or be signs of well contamination vulnerability. The two common items to test for are [coliform bacteria](#) and [nitrate](#). A portion of Linn, Benton, and Lane counties currently are part of a designated groundwater management area, declared by the DEQ due to widespread contamination issues. For more information on the [Southern Willamette Valley Groundwater Management Area](#) read their research and action plan.

Where: The OSU Extension Service office in Benton County provides free nitrate screenings in the office during business hours. Drop-in nitrate screening clinics are also offered throughout the Southern Willamette Valley Groundwater Management Area. For coliform bacteria and other additional testing, well owners will need to use a private laboratory that serves Oregon. [EM 8677 Private Laboratories that Serve Oregon](#) is an OSU Extension Service publication that can help you a lab in your local area. Plan ahead as each lab has different prices, testing packages, and sampling requirements, so we advise you to contact the laboratory first.

When: Domestic wells should be screened for Coliform bacteria and nitrate every 1 to 3 years as part of a routine testing schedule. Additionally, after a flood event or if the water suddenly changes color or smell it is important to screen for coliform to ensure the health and safety of your family. If you choose to put invest in a form of water treatment system (ex: water softener) it is a good idea to test how much of whatever element (ex: iron, hydrogen sulfide, manganese) in the water you are treating for. This will help you pick the right scale of treatment system.

[A Summary of Home Water Quality Problems and Solutions](#) can help you determine what types of treatment options are available to you. In Oregon, domestic wells are also required to be tested for [arsenic](#), [coliform bacteria](#), and [nitrate](#) during [real estate transactions](#).

Why: To ensure the safety of your family's drinking water, their health, and protection of water as a resource.

If you would like help or have additional questions about your well, please call your local [OSU Extension Service](#) office.