Bacteria

Owners of private wells are responsible for ensuring that their water is safe from contaminants. The presence of contaminants in water can lead to health issues, including gastrointestinal illness, reproductive problems, and neurological disorders.

What is bacteria?
Bacteria are in the environment in soil, on plants, animals, and in very large numbers in the feces of warm-blooded animals. The presence of total coliform bacteria in a water supply means that the water supply has been exposed to one or more of these sources. The presences of total coliforms in drinking water can indicate that more dangerous germs, like fecal coliforms, have contaminated the water.

Where and how does bacteria get into drinking water?
The most common source of bacteria is the soil surrounding the well. Fecal bacteria in drinking water are usually the result of contamination by a nearby sewer, septic tank, or animals. Bacterial contaminants also may be introduced into a well during construction or repair.

What are the health effects?
Disease-causing bacteria, such as E. coli, can trigger gastrointestinal illnesses, diarrhea, and vomiting. Some bacteria can be life-threatening for infants, children, the elderly, and those with compromised immune systems.

How can I find out whether there is bacteria in my drinking water?
You should test for bacteria *yearly*, usually in the spring, or if you notice any change in your water. You should also test if:

- Anyone in the household suffers recurring bouts of gastrointestinal illness.
- An infant is living in the house, or someone in the house is pregnant.
- Flooding has occurred in your area, or the well has been inundated by surface runoff.
- You are buying a home and wish to assess the quality of the drinking water.

As the well owner, you are responsible for sampling and testing your drinking water. DEQ has compiled a list of laboratories in the state for your convenience. *Provide the link to the labs.*

How do I remove bacteria from my drinking water?
You must disinfect your well to eliminate bacteria. Chlorine, ultra-violet light or ozone treatments will kill or inactivate E. coli and other harmful bacteria in drinking water. On a temporary basis, drinking water could be boiled to remove bacteria from the water. This should be done for water used for drinking, food preparation, dishwashing or tooth brushing. Water should be boiled vigorously for one full minute.

Additional Resources
EPA- Emergency Disinfection of Drinking Water