

Drinking from a well? Get your water tested

By Carmela Fragomeni

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More than one-quarter of the private wells tested in Hamilton last year contained potentially dangerous bacteria.

Public health officials said 27 per cent of samples brought in by residents were contaminated by a range of bacteria that included E. coli. But there were no reports of illness resulting from the contamination.

Officials are more concerned by the fact that only a fraction of well owners are getting their water tested. Only 2,072 of almost 10,000 well owners submitted samples.

"Just because it looks fine and you're healthy, it doesn't mean it will always be safe," says health protection manager Eric Mathews.

Mathews said residents need look no further than Walkerton to see the importance of testing. One strain of E. coli in the municipal supply killed seven people and sickened thousands of others.

Bacteria found in wells typically seeps in from nearby, often from surface water runoff getting in through improperly fitted caps or lids, cracked tiles or poor drainage.

Flamborough well owners seem to be the most diligent at getting their water tested. About 70 per cent of the samples submitted came from that area.

The water testing is provided free by the Ministry of Health, but well owners have to pick up and drop off the bottles used to collect the water. The samples are collected by the city and sent to the Ministry of Health's lab on the Mountain.

Six new water bottle pickup locations added throughout Hamilton last year make it easier for well owners to submit samples.

They are at Highland Country Markets in Stoney Creek; Dee's Bakery in Valens; Copetown's General Store, Carlisle's Post Office; Rockton's General Store and Waterloo-Oxford Co-operative Inc. in Lynden.

cfragomeni@thespec.com

905-526-3392

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