

# What Happens When a Water Test Is Positive?

## Understanding the Results of Your Coliform Bacteria Test

As you know, we recently performed a total coliform bacteria test on your water. The results have come back **POSITIVE**.

### What does a positive test result mean?

Total coliforms are rarely infectious bacteria that are commonly found in the environment. The presence of these bacteria in your water does not necessarily indicate an immediate health risk; however, their presence indicates that the risk of infectious microorganisms—including bacteria, virus, or protozoa—have a pathway to your water source and could be present.

### What do you need to do immediately?

The presence of these organisms does not necessarily indicate an immediate issue, but the risk of one is much higher. As a result, public health agencies recommend you stop drinking your water and only use boiled water for cooking and other essential needs like brushing teeth. You can continue to shower normally.

### What are your options for the longer term?

You have a few options to consider for next steps. We can discuss the pros and cons of these with you to help you determine the most-appropriate path forward.

**1. Do nothing.** As noted above, total coliforms are not necessarily infectious. Because they exist in similar environments to those microorganisms that are infectious, their presence means there is a pathway to your water source for something that might cause illness.

- 2. Retest.** We can test your water again, or you can have it tested by a third-party laboratory. Proper sampling techniques are critical to the testing process, and there is always a possibility that some cross-contamination could have occurred. If you choose to use a certified lab for validation, make sure the sample is drawn using best practices.
- 3. Inspect the well, perform shock chlorination, and then retest.** As total coliforms are common in the environment, their presence indicates a direct link between the surface environment and the well. Deficiencies within the well itself may be to blame. Repairing those deficiencies in conjunction with shock chlorination could address the contamination. However, in many instances, the pathways are not created by the well's construction, and thus, the shock chlorination process is only temporarily effective.
- 4. Install a continuous treatment system.** Many highly effective treatment technologies are available for managing microbial contamination in water—some physical and some chemical. Ultraviolet light is the most common physical treatment method, and chlorine injection is the most common chemical approach. Each one has advantages and disadvantages. We can help you determine the option that is best suited to your water, your family, and your budget.

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**Have questions about your test? Ready to talk next steps? Contact us at:**