



Arsenic in Private Drinking Water Wells (Frequently Asked Questions)

1) ***What is arsenic?***

Arsenic is a naturally occurring element found throughout the world and occurs in many different forms.

2) ***Typical sources of arsenic.***

- Arsenic is found in soil, water and food. For example, many types of seafood have high levels of arsenic.
- Another source is pesticides and herbicides
Example: arsenic compounds were used in cattle dip vats for many years to kill ticks.
Example: arsenic compounds were also used on various crops, fruit trees and tobacco plants to prevent damage from insects
- Arsenic based herbicides were used on railroad right of ways, roadsides, golf courses and turf farms as a weed killer.
- Railroad ties were treated with arsenic based compounds as a wood preservative.

3) ***Is arsenic a concern for residents in Central Florida?***

- Drinking water wells have been sampled by the Department of Health (DOH) in many central Florida counties and have been found to contain elevated levels of arsenic.
- Levels of arsenic above 10 ppb (parts per billion) are considered unacceptable.
- In Hernando County, at least 158 drinking water wells have been found to have arsenic above the acceptable level. Hillsborough has reported approximately 66; Citrus has 58 and Polk has 35.
- Hernando County has an extensive drinking water well sampling program and to date has sampled over 400 wells.

4) ***What does arsenic look and smell like?***

Arsenic in drinking water has no taste or odor so it cannot be detected without lab testing.

5) ***How do I know if I have high arsenic levels in my drinking water?***

- Local health departments will sample private wells.
- In Hernando County, residents can request sampling by calling 352-540-6800 ext: 82145.
- Samples are analyzed at the Florida Department of Health lab in Jacksonville and results are available within three weeks of testing.

5a.) Does the property owner need to be home when tested?

- No, but it is preferable. The homeowner may assist DOH staff by answering questions and by providing easy access to well.
- Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates help DOH staff identify the location of the well.
- A permanent Florida unique ID tag is affixed to each well.

5b.) Does the property owner have to request water sampling?

- In some cases, yes. DOH does not have regulatory authority over private wells and therefore must have the owner's permission to test.
- If a well above the acceptable limit is identified, up to ten wells within a quarter mile radius are sampled at DOH/DEP request.

5c.) When is re-sampling suggested?

Re-sampling is performed when initial test results are between 8 and 10 ppb (parts per billion).

6.) If there is elevated arsenic in my well, what can I do to fix it?

- Once a private well has been identified as having an elevated level of arsenic, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) will notify the well owner of the availability of a permanent granular activated carbon filter to remove the arsenic.
- The filter is provided, installed and maintained by DEP at no charge to the well owner.
- Free bottled drinking water is also provided to the well owner until the filter is installed.

7.) What are the Health effects of arsenic exposure?

Long term ingestion (70 years) of elevated levels of arsenic can increase the risk of skin cancer and cancer of the lungs, bladder, kidney, liver and prostate.

7a.) Will elevated arsenic levels effect my animals?

Yes, the effects may be similar to those occurring in humans.

7b.) Will elevated arsenic levels effect my plants and garden?

No, not at the levels found in Central Florida water.

7c.) Is there a medical test that can be done to tell if someone has been exposed to arsenic?

Yes, exposure within the last few days can be determined by a urine test. Tests of hair can measure exposure over the last 6-12 months.

If arsenic exposure ceases, the body excretes the arsenic within a few days.

For additional information on arsenic in drinking water go to <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts2.html> or contact the Hernando County Health Department at 352-540-6800 ext: 82145.