

Is all well with your drinking water?

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(HealthDay)—More than 15 million homes in the United States get their water from private wells, according to federal estimates.

While the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regulates public drinking water, people with private wells need to check their water themselves, along with other maintenance steps.

This is especially important if you're thinking about having a baby. Many studies over the past 15 years have found a greater risk of birth defects in babies whose mothers drank well water with concentrations of certain contaminants.

You can't rely on how your water looks coming out of the faucet to evaluate its safety. That's because dangerous contaminants don't always affect color or smell. One example is [nitrate](#), a chemical found in many fertilizers that can leech into the [water table](#). It's long been linked to birth defects like limb deformities and cleft palates.

A 2016 study done at the Texas A&M Health Science Center School of Public Health and published in the journal *Current Environmental Health Reports* linked two other common substances to birth defects: atrazine and arsenic. Atrazine is an herbicide that can get into soil and groundwater. Arsenic most often leeches into water naturally, from bedrock, but that doesn't make it less dangerous.

Various types of birth defects have been seen when two or more of these contaminants are present at the same time.

If a private well is your primary source of drinking water, ask your local [health](#) department how to find a [water](#) testing facility near you, or call the EPA Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has detailed information on [well testing](#), along with other topics concerning private wells.

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