

wellcare® information for you about

CARING FOR DUG WELLS

What is a Dug Well?

Dug wells are typically shallow, usually less than 50 feet deep, and have a larger diameter (often 2 to 4 feet or more). They are constructed by hand or with excavation equipment and may be lined with materials like tile, brick, or concrete rings to help stabilize the walls. Due to their shallow depth and wider opening, dug wells are especially vulnerable to contamination from surface runoff, nearby septic systems, seasonal changes, and other pollution sources.

Maintenance for Dug Wells

Proper maintenance is essential to ensure dug wells remain a safe and reliable source of drinking water. Due to their shallow depth and higher risk of contamination, dug wells require routine inspections, protective measures, and regular water testing.

Following these best practices can help prevent issues before they become serious and protect both your water supply and your health:

Inspect Regularly

- Check the well cover or cap for cracks or gaps making sure it is always sealed and inaccessible to children and animals
- Ensure the well casing or lining is in good condition
- Remove any debris and vegetation from the wellhead
- Keep the area around the well graded to drain water away

Protect from Contaminants

- Avoid storing chemicals, fuel, or fertilizers near the well
- Maintain your septic system and check state and local requirements for minimum distance from the well
- Do not allow surface water (rain or snowmelt) to pool near the well

Water Quality Testing

- Test the well water at least once a year for bacteria (e.g., total coliform, E. coli)
- Test more often if the water changes in taste, smell, or color
- Consider testing for nitrates, especially in agricultural areas

Common Problems in Dug Wells

Problem	Signs	Actions
Bacterial contamination	Illness, of smell or taste	Disinfect well, retest water
Sediment or cloudy water	Murky appearance, clogged filters	Inspect well structure, test for source
Low yield or dry well	Reduced water flow, dry taps	Conserve water, consider deepening the well, or find alternative sources
Structural damage	Collapsing lining or cover	Contact a licensed well contractor immediately

Seasonal Considerations

- **Spring/Fall:** Inspect after snowmelt or heavy rain for surface water intrusion
- **Summer:** Monitor for signs of drought or low water levels
- **Winter:** Ensure well cap is sealed to protect against snow, ice, and debris

When to Call a Professional

While regular maintenance can help prevent many issues, some problems with dug wells require the expertise of a licensed professional. To protect your water supply and ensure your well operates safely and efficiently, contact a licensed well contractor if you experience any of the following:

- Your water quality tests positive for bacteria or other contaminants
- The structure appears damaged or unsafe
- If you are unsure about the age or condition of the well
- If you notice any changes to the water pressure or mechanics of the well

To find a licensed well contractor in your area, you can use [our interactive map](#).

For More Information on Caring for Dug Wells

Contact your local or state health department, cooperative extension, licensed well contractor, or the [wellcare®](#) Hotline.

View our information sheets for more tips on [Well Maintenance](#) and [Well Water Testing](#).



Information to help maintain and protect your water well system:

[wellcare®](#) is a program of the [Water Systems Council \(WSC\)](#). WSC is the only national organization solely focused on protecting the health and water supply of an estimated 23 million households nationwide who depend on private wells (according to the U.S. EPA).

This publication is one of more than 100 [wellcare®](#) information sheets available FREE at www.watersystemscouncil.org.

Well owners and others with questions about wells and well water can contact the [wellcare®](#) Hotline at 1-888-395-1033 or visit www.wellcarehotline.org to fill out a contact form or chat with us live!

JOIN THE WELLCARE® WELL OWNERS NETWORK!

By joining the FREE [wellcare®](#) Well Owners Network, you will receive regular information on how to maintain your well and protect your well water.

Contact us at 1-888-395-1033 or visit www.wellcarehotline.org to join!