

wellcare<sup>®</sup> information for you about

# MERCURY & WELL WATER

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## What is Mercury?

Mercury is a silvery metal found in small amounts in the earth's crust. Common forms of mercury are metallic mercury, inorganic mercury, and methylmercury. Metallic mercury is an element that has not reacted with another substance. When mercury reacts with other substances, it can form compounds of inorganic mercury salts or methylmercury. At room temperature, metallic mercury is an odorless liquid that can slowly evaporate. It is the metal element best known for its use in old thermometers, fluorescent light bulbs, and some electrical switches.

Mercury can get enter your private well from erosion of rocks underground, improper disposal of household products such as outdoor paints, and industrial and agricultural activities, such as mining, smelting operations, or coal-fired power plants. Mercury-based pesticides once used on farmland and orchards could also pose a risk to groundwater supplies.

## What are the health effects of Mercury?

Overexposure to mercury can result in damage to gastrointestinal tract, nervous system, and kidneys. Young children and developing fetuses are at greatest risk from the harmful effects of mercury. Symptoms of overexposure can include skin rashes, mood swings, memory loss, and muscle weakness.

The U.S. Environmental Protection (EPA) sets a maximum limit for exposure to mercury in drinking water of 2 parts per billion (ppb). Well owners are encouraged to use this level as a guideline for when well water should be treated. If your state has a lower maximum level for copper in drinking water, this level supersedes the EPA level and should be used in its place.

If you suspect contamination or experience illness, stop drinking and cooking with the water immediately and do not resume until testing has proven it to be safe to use. Always seek advice from your medical doctor if you have any health concerns.

## How do I test for Mercury?

The only way to be certain if you have mercury in your drinking water supply is to have the water tested. Contact your state or local health department for a list of state-certified laboratories in your area or use [our interactive map](#).

## What are the treatments for Mercury in well water?

There are a number of treatment devices available to help reduce mercury in water including coagulation/filtration, granular activated carbon (GAC), lime softening, and reverse osmosis. Treatment systems should be certified by NSF or Water Quality Association (WQA) when available. To find treatment systems that are certified visit [NSF](#) or [WQA](#) websites. It is necessary to maintain treatment devices as specified by the manufacturer or your water treatment professional. You should also retest your water after treatment is installed and after maintenance to confirm the effectiveness of the device. Contact a certified water treatment professional for guidance. To locate a certified water treatment professional in your area, visit [WQA's website](#).

***Note: Boiling water is not recommended as it can release certain forms of mercury into the air.***

## For More Information on Mercury & Well Water

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



## 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](http://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](http://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](http://www.wellcarehotline.org) to join!